

Facts From Old Postal Route-Books

MYRTLE WALKER AMICK

Much source material for the study of the early towns and routes of travel in Indiana is to be found in the old Route-Books of the Post Office Department. The legislation establishing the Department provides in one section that "an abstract of the bids received containing the names of the parties offering and the terms and duration of the proposed contracts shall be recorded in a well bound book." Today it is in these "well bound books" that much of interest is found relating to the postal service in the territory and the later state of Indiana.

The exact beginnings of mail delivery in the Northwest Territory, part of which later became the Territory of Indiana, are not definitely established, a fire in the Department in 1836 having destroyed a part of the records. Yet from a Cincinnati paper we know of at least one route traversing the territory. The period 1814-1817, however, is covered in the old leather-bound books, which much resemble the ledgers and journals found in country stores of southern Indiana half a century ago. In them are recorded the results of the advertisements which appeared at frequent intervals in newspapers of this period under the caption, "Proposals to Carry Mails". Section 4 of the Act of March 2, 1799, provides, among other conditions, that these advertisements must be

published in one or more newspapers in the state or states where the contract is to be performed for at least 6 weeks before entering into any contract for carrying the mail; where such contract is intended to be made and the day on which it is to be concluded, describing the places from and to which such mail is to be conveyed and the time it is to be made up and the day and hour it is to be delivered.

Among the conditions listed were some that are quite interesting. Bids on each route must be made separately, and the route, the sum, the mode of service and the residence of the bidder must each be distinctly stated in each bid. No proposal was to be considered unless accompanied by a guarantee signed by one or more responsible persons in the form specified in the law. One condition laid down was, that, should a contractor run a stage or other vehicle more rapidly or frequently than he was required to carry the mail, he must give the same increased frequency and celerity to the

mail and without increased compensation. On routes where transportation was more difficult in some seasons than in others, the law permitted the contractors to submit proposals for carrying mail on horseback or in wagons or carts instead of by coach or stage for a specified number of weeks or months each year. Such proposals must be considered and a decision made. Unless provision was made in the contract for the submission of proposals, however, post-coach or stage-coach service could not be dispensed with on any route.¹

The first complete record contained in the post Office archives covering a period for Indiana is from January 1, 1814, to December 31, 1817. The arrangement is alphabetical, so that one page may be for a route in Ohio or the Indiana Territory and the next page devoted to a contract for carrying the mail in Connecticut. The post-office where the route began determined the alphabetical order; thus, on page twenty-three, is listed the route from Charlestown to Salem, the Cincinnati routes beginning on page twenty-four. Each route was allotted one page, the data being recorded in the meretricious penmanship of the book-keeping style of that time. Errors in spelling were not infrequent, creeping in no doubt through copying the penmanship of others which might in turn have been copied from the reports of the post-masters of the West who usually had their own ideas of spelling; as an example the name Vevay appears as *Vevais* in several places in one of the books.

On page twenty of the volume for 1814 to 1817, is recorded the first route for Indiana. Chillicothe was one of the important mail centers west of the Alleghanies and from this point a route extended by way of Fayette, Zenia, Dayton, Lexington, Eaton and on to Salisbury, the early county seat of Wayne County, Indiana. The contractor, Jacob Ayers, received \$150 per quarter for weekly trips on this route. On page twenty-three, the contract between James M. Taggart and the federal government is recorded. There was a weekly mail between Charlestown, then the county seat of Clarke County, by Indiana (?) Ferry to Salem and return for which the contractor received \$42.50. It is assumed that this was for one quarter of three months. Whether

¹ *Indiana Democrat*, May 22, 1839.

the pay period was for the quarter or the year is often not indicated.

From Cincinnati, as recorded on page twenty-four of this volume, a route by way of Cleves, North Bend, Mouth of the Miami, Lawrenceburg (Lawrenceburg), Laughery Creek, Vevay, Jefferson C. H. (Madison), Smockville, Charlestown, Jeffersonville and thence to Louisville was awarded to John Jackson for a consideration of \$1370. The schedule was as follows: Leave Cincinnati Thursday at four in the afternoon; leave Lawrenceburg at eleven in the forenoon; arrive at Louisville on Sunday at six in the morning. The return trip was made, the mail leaving Louisville at six in the forenoon on Monday and arriving in Cincinnati at ten in the forenoon on the following Thursday. The abbreviation *f.* is used to indicate the forenoon with *a.* for afternoon. *A.M.* and *P.M.* do not appear as abbreviations in the book.

Page forty-two records a route from Frankfort, Kentucky, to Vevay, Indiana, which includes deliveries at Newcastle and Port William (later Carrollton) at the mouth of the Kentucky River. Here Vevais is used in the index. John Jackson was again the successful bidder on this route, but the terms of the contract are omitted. The trip was made once each week, the mail leaving Frankfort at six in the forenoon on Sunday and reaching "Vevais" at four in the afternoon of the following day.

Page fifty-eight records a route for Indiana Territory which began at Hendersontown, Kentucky, crossed Illinois and ran on into Missouri Territory. The route extended from Hendersontown, by way of the Ohio River, to Shawneetown, and through U.S. Saline, Jordon's, Big Muddy, Little Muddy, Coxe's and Kaskaskia. The term of this contract was for a part of one year only, April 1, 1814, to Dec. 31, 1814, the consideration being \$375. Page seventy lists the route from Kaskaskia, through Prairie du Roche, St. Phillips, Harrisonville, Herculanum, Cahokia, St. Louis and on to St. Charles. J. McArthur was the successful bidder for this route.

Up the valley of the Whitewater, then an outpost of western civilization, ran a mail route, as reported on page seventy-five, from the river through Lawrenceburg by way of Allen's Ferry and Brookville to Salisbury. William Hendricks was awarded the contract on this route and received

\$75 as the consideration. The term of the contract was from Jan. 1, 1814, to Dec. 31, 1817. Nothing indicates whether the consideration was for the quarter or the year. The trip required something over one day, leaving Lawrenceburg on Friday forenoon and arriving at the youthful seat of justice of Wayne county the following afternoon.

Perhaps the most important mail route at this period was that from Louisville to Vincennes, passing through New Albany. The trip required from Monday morning until Thursday afternoon, going west, and from Thursday afternoon to Sunday afternoon on the return trip. William B. Gamble was awarded this route, with the amount of \$150 written down opposite his name, presumed to be for the quarter. For weekly service to the Saline from Vincennes, Ab Westfall received \$100 per quarter. The route lay through Columbia, Princeton, and Miller's Ferry.

It must be remembered that in Indiana at that time there were only sixteen regularly established post offices (1815) with 609 miles of post roads. The "nett amount of postage" which was collected (stamps were not used at this time) totalled \$542.63 and the rates were much higher than now. The total cost for the transportation of the mail for Indiana during the year of 1815 was \$987.50.

This was just at the time when the territory and state experienced a rapid expansion, following the War of 1812. During the next few years of the expansion of the mail service, the attempt was made to keep pace with the growth in population. By January 1, 1824, there was a large number of routes recorded, but the Route-Book which has been preserved lists only the routes and their numbers without specifying the terms of the contracts or the names of the contractors. The routes for Indiana were assigned numbers in the three hundred block. Thus, route No. 350 ran from Vernon through Geneva, Columbus, Edinburg and Franklin to Indianapolis, a distance of seventy-five miles. Route No. 344 ran from Bedford, Kentucky, to Milton, Kentucky, thence to Madison, Indiana, and through Vernon, Paris, Lexington, New London and across the Ohio to Bedford again, a distance of eighty-one miles. Route No. 364 began at Lawrenceburg, thence to Georgetown, Harrison (Ohio), New Trenton, Brookville, Connersville, Centerville, Jacksonburg, and Smith's to Winchester, Indiana. Route No. 351 ran from Lawrenceburg

through Vaughn's, Napoleon, Greensburg and Shelby (ville) to Indianapolis, a distance of ninety miles. Route No. 347 ran from Louisville, by way of New Albany, Corydon, Fredonia, Troy, Rockport, Boonville and Evansville to Princeton, a distance of one hundred sixty-five miles. No. 349 ran from Indianapolis through Martinsville, Spencer, and Burlington to Washington, a distance of one hundred three miles. Some of the routes served certain places as the mail was carried in one direction and different places on the return. Route No. 352 from Salem to Bloomington included Bono and Palestine on the outgoing trip and Hindostan and Spicy Valley on the way back. Mount Vernon was served on Route No. 356, on the way out and Harmonie (New Harmony) on the return, the route extending from Vincennes to Shawneetown, Illinois. This route included also Princeton, Ewingsville, Cynthianna, Springfield and Mount of the Wabash (not a P.O.).

The period under consideration was, of course, one in which the population of the state was increasing rapidly and the postal service was attempting to keep pace. The directory for 1811 includes for Indiana territory six offices² while the directory for 1817 lists thirty-four offices.³

By 1830 it is reported that the time from Louisville to Vincennes, a distance of one hundred twenty-four miles, was covered in thirty-four hours. Vincennes was a center for distribution of mail and mail left that place for St. Louis two hours after arrival from Louisville. The one hundred seventy miles was covered in forty-six hours. On December 23, 1828, a resolution was introduced in the National House under the heading "Application of Indiana for New Mail Routes". The resolution stated that "because of the unparalleled increase in population and business of the state and because of the necessity of prompt means of correspondence with the General government and commercial centers. . . a direct mail stage route upon the located line of the

² The list of offices and postmasters for 1811: Corydon, Spier Spencer; Emersonville, Jesse Emerson; Jeffersonville, James Lemon; Laurenceburg, James Dill; Vevay, John F. Dufour; Vincennes, General W. Johnston.

³ The list of post offices for 1817: Allens' Ferry, Bath, Bethlehem, Charleston, Columbia, Corydon, Emersonville, Flemings, Georgetown, Greenville, Harmonie, Hartford, Hazelton's Ferry, Jeffersonville, Laurenceburg, Leveston's, Lexington, Madison, Montgomeryville, Nanceville, New Albany, New Natchez, New Trenton, Nicholl's Inn, Princeton, Provine, Rising Sun, Salem, Salisbury, Smockville, Valonia, Vevay, Vincennes, White Oak Springs (Petersburg). By 1837, the number of post offices in Indiana had increased to one hundred thirty-five.

National road, thence through Indiana and Illinois to Missouri," should be established.

The pages of the Route-Book which includes the entries for the mail service in Indiana from 1834 to 1838 give much more complete information than earlier records, and contain the mode of transportation and often the names of all the bidders for carrying the mail over a route. The routes are numbered in the 3,000 block. Route No. 3,017 ran from Lafayette, by way of Battleground, Americus, Delphi, Tip-tonsport, Lewisburg, Peru, Treaty Ground, Largo, Panes (?) Springs, Huntington and Aboitre (?) to Fort Wayne, a distance of one hundred nineteen miles. The contractor was John R. Merritt and the consideration \$1400. No. 3,018 ran from Fort Wayne by way of Kendallville, Marcy, Mongoguiong, Lima and Scott to White Pigeon (Michigan), a distance of seventy miles and back. William Suttonfield was the contractor with \$499 the consideration named in the contract.

Route No. 3,025 ran from Richmond to Cincinnati, the mail being transported twice a week, in stages from Richmond to Brookville, and three times a week, in stages, from Brookville to Cincinnati. Abner McCarty received \$1200 for the performance of this duty. The towns along this route that received mail from these stages were. Abington, Brownsville, Liberty, Dunlapville, Fairfield, Brookville, Cedar Grove, New Trenton, Harrison (Ohio), Clark's Store, Miami and Cheviot. The total distance was seventy-six and one-half miles with the Route-Book showing the distance between each town to the next. Brownsville, Union county, to Liberty is shown as four and one-half miles; Liberty to Dunlapville, four and one-half miles, and so on along the route.

Many notes are found written on the pages, concerning correspondence with the various offices. Thus an entry: postmaster at Madison, Ia. [Ind.] reports under date of 30 Aug 37 that Mr Brisben, the contractor is absent in La and that he has employed James Wilson to carry the mail;" "Sept. 6, 1837 the PM General approves the above arrangement and directs that a contract be made with Wilson for the residue of the term viz till Jan'y 1838;" "1837 Aug 25. The PM General directed the contractor to supply Republican on return trip omitting Ramsey;" "1 March 1837, the PM General directs that 4 additional weekly mails be carried between Indianapolis and Logansport, 70 miles at pro rata of

\$1,674 per annum under condition that the mail be carried in 4 horse post coaches." An additional entry under date of Aug 24, 1837, certifies that "under date of 11 Aug 37 the above order was complied with on the 24 April 37." Route 3,037, was awarded to Cyrus and Jordon of Logansport for a total consideration of \$4,436 (which included the additional compensation mentioned in a later note) and was transported three times a week in stages. The route served the following towns from Indianapolis: Augusta, Eagle Village, Northfield, Kirk's Cross Roads, Michigantown, Middlefork, Burlington, Wild Cat, Deer Creek, Logansport, Metea, Rochester, Chippewa, Sidney, Plymouth, South Bend, Olive (discontinued) and Terre Coupee. The total distance, both ways, was one hundred fifty-two and one-half miles.

Route No. 3,031 ran from Richmond to Peru, the contract being let to L. R. Brownell for an annual consideration of \$340. The route included Greenfork, Economy, Palmyra, Blountsville, Muncy town, Cranberry, Greenberry and Marion, a distance of one hundred seven and one-half miles. A note on this page, under date of Aug. 31, 1837, states that "the PMs of Richmond and Peru certified that the 2nd weekly mail commenced on the 27th day of June, 1836." Over routes from Indianapolis to Madison and from Indianapolis to Cincinnati three weekly trips were made in four-horse post-coaches. James H. Wallace & Co. received \$1893 yearly compensation for carrying the mails over the Madison route which included Greenwood, Franklin, Edinburg, Woodruff (supplied alternately) Columbus, Scipio, Vernon, Lancaster and Wirt. James Jones & Co. covered the one hundred thirteen miles three times each week for a compensation of \$2,000 per annum on the Cincinnati route. The revenue from passengers and packages on these stage routes no doubt supplemented the receipts from the transportation of the mails.

There were many short routes on which contracts were let. John Boner of Vernon received \$25 per annum for service on a six-mile route, from Milton in Wayne county to Jacksonburgh in the same county. Wesley Goodwin received \$50 per annum for his weekly trips from New Castle to Milton. There must have been more spirited bidding on some routes than others. Route No. 3,032, eighty-three miles from Indianapolis to Lafayette netted the contractor only \$398 per annum. This route ran by the way of Piketon, Rodman's,

Lebanon, Thorntown, Frankfort, Jefferson, Prairieville, Huntersville and Dayton. J. O. and S. M. Orchards, owners of the "Temperance Inn" at Bloomington, were the contractors on the Louisville-Indianapolis route. Many contractors operated several routes, John Boner of Vernon being the successful bidder on six different routes. The *Indiana Register* (Vevay) of —, 1816, carried the advertisement "Post-rider wanted, immediately, a sober, steady person as a post rider." The contractor evidently sub-let these routes as he saw fit.

Annulment of the contracts and discontinuance of the route was one of the privileges of the Postmaster General upon the payment of an extra month's allowance. An entry shows that an eighty-mile route was discontinued on December 31, 1837, from Martinsville by way of Danville and Alexander's Tavern to Lebanon. The amounts of time scheduled for trips were being reduced all the time. Thus on Route No. 3,051, the time from Indianapolis to Lafayette was reduced to sixteen hours, and the trip made all in one day, leaving Indianapolis daily at 4:00 A.M. and reaching Lafayette at 8:00 P.M.

The period, July 1, 1839, to June 30, 1842, saw a still further increase in the number of contracts for routes let. Various newspapers listed the several routes in detail under the caption "Proposals for Carrying Mail of the United States." Several pages would be required to list them. A few were: Route No. 2,646, Bedford, by way of Frazier's Store and Hamerslys Mills to Mount Pleasant, thirty-five miles and back, once a week; No. 2,649, Defiance, Ohio, to Mongoguining, seventy miles and back, once in two weeks; No. 2,653, Fort Wayne by way of Whitley C. H. and Warsaw to Plymouth, seventy-five miles and back, once each week; No. 2,657, Greencastle by way of New Maysville and North Salem to Jamestown, twenty-eight miles and back once a week; No. 2,645, Bedford by way of Elder John Shorts', Bloomfield and Scaffold Prairie to Bowling Green, sixty miles and back, once a week. Mail left Bedford every Monday at 6:00 A.M. arriving at Bowling Green the next day at 6:00 P.M.; No. 2,665, Logansport by way of Winamot, Sherwoods' Ferry and Valparaiso to City West, eighty-five miles and back, once each week.

Mail boats always played an important part in the commerce of river towns along the Ohio. The contract for the period from January 1, 1838, and ending June 30, 1842, for the transportation of the mail from Louisville to New Orleans was awarded to Johnson and Strader for \$180,000. This also provided for mail service to St. Louis tri-weekly for the first year and daily mail service for the balance of term. Under the terms of the contract, the down trip to New Orleans was to be made in seven days, and the up trip in eleven days, or as much sooner as practicable. A room for mail, provided with lock and key, was specified. The St. Louis service was discontinued because "the community was entirely indifferent" to it. The Government saved \$20,000, a note, entered later, informs us. A further saving of \$75,000 was effected by discontinuing later the daily service on the main line, with an additional saving of \$2,000 "for carriers at the river offices." Fines were imposed for delays of the mail and for failure to deliver at the proper destination. There were other penalties, "exclusive of retrenchments already stated," amounting to \$10,670.

On this river route, No. 3,330, Evansville received a tri-weekly mail and Mt. Vernon, Indiana, received one delivery each week. Shawneetown, Illinois, received mail three times each week, while certain offices in Kentucky, received weekly deliveries on this line. A specification in the contract required "mails for tri-weekly offices to be sent in separate bag for each office—for the once a week offices all in one bag." The iron lock was to be used, except on the Louisville and New Orleans bags which were to be secured by a brass lock.

For some time on the stage lines through Indiana all the mail was placed in leather portmanteaux, each one securely locked upon the beginning of the trip, each post master along the route unlocked the large lock, took out the mail addressed to his office, placed the out-going mail in the bag, and it went on with the stage to the next office. Post-riders on horseback carried the mail in saddle-bags which they provided themselves. The penalty for mail robbery in this period was whipping, twenty lashes for the first offense, and death for the second. One post rider on the Vincennes-St. Louis route was robbed and killed but there is no record of this kind in Indiana.

The entries in these Route-books as to the fines are of interest. Peter Beers was fined \$38 for "failure to carry the mail in stages" on the Richmond-Winchester route. The contractor on the Evansville-Fredonia route was fined \$9 for "failure to observe schedule days." John Clark on the Vincennes-Louisville route had \$20 deducted from his pay for "leaving the great letter mail at Louisville" and again for "leaving newspaper bags at Louisville." Charles Waterhouse was fined \$5 for "wet mail at Maumee, O." on the Ft. Wayne-Maumee route. A similar fine was imposed for "wet mail at Indianapolis" on the contractor carrying the Logansport-Indianapolis mail. A fine was remitted "in consideration of the difficulties occasioned by the construction of the National Road and the interruptions of the Ferry." Still another fine was imposed because "way mail was included in the large mail." A fine was imposed on John L. Smith of the Louisville-Fredonia route, the amount being \$100 for reducing service from stages to horses", but this fine was later "remitted, the contractor having the privilege by the terms of the contract."

The first railroad reached Indianapolis in 1847 and shortly after that date came the beginning of mail transportation by railway trains. However, during the eighteenth-fifties, many contracts were let along stage and horse routes which served as feeders to the railroad service. As an example, in a list of mail routes in Indiana published in 1851, on Route No. 3,964, mail was carried from Salem on Tuesdays and Saturdays by way of Walunt Ridge, Cortland, Millport, Valonia, Brownstown, Payntersville, Rockford and Reddington to Scipio. The last town was located on the Madison and Indianapolis railroad. Mail coming down the river to Madison, was carried by rail to Scipio and then along stage lines to other points. This arrangement was common until the time of the Civil War, after which, the old routes served by horses passed out in Indiana.