10-1979

Stagecoach Roads to Marshall

Max S. Lale
"We passed the broad lane, cut through the tall timber, which showed the boundary line between the United States and the young Republic, and after swimming some streams and traversing divers canebrakes, we reached the house of my friend in safety." Thus the Rev. James Gallaher, a travelling minister of the Presbyterian Church, described the start of a missionary incursion from Shreveport, Louisiana, into the Republic of Texas on horseback in 1845.1

In recording his experiences, the Rev. Mr. Gallaher also left a record of the difficulties of travel in the early days of Harrison County's settlement, illuminating thereby the importance which the early settlers placed upon reliable communications. This was especially true of access to the older, more established areas of the United States from which they had migrated. Westward there was little about which to be concerned.

The travelling clergyman described the Marshall toward which he directed his mount as an unprepossessing village of "small log houses covered with clap boards" and with bushes "growing all over the public square and along the streets." Settled some years earlier as the third seat of Harrison County government, Marshall had been incorporated as a municipality by the Ninth Congress only a few months earlier, on December 31, 1844. The town limits were declared by the incorporating statute to "extend one-half mile in a square, so laid off as to leave the public square in the center of said corporation."

The importance of Shreveport and the adjacent states of Louisiana and Arkansas to Marshall's development had been noted even earlier by Charles DeMorse, editor of the Clarksville Northern Standard, in a letter from Marshall which appeared in his newspaper on September 24, 1842. Stopping "to have some repairs made on my buggy," DeMorse found the population of Harrison County "is now about 500, and a considerable part of the increase has been composed of people with property — planters with negroes. Shreveport is a convenient medium for landing in this section of county . . . ."2

After the Congress of the Republic of Texas created Harrison County from a portion of Shelby County on January 8, 1839, an already prospering community which enjoyed river communication with Shreveport assumed new significance to the county's increasing population. This was Port Caddo, twenty

Max Lale lives in Marshall, Texas.
miles northeast of Marshall on Big Cypress Bayou, which in the years between 1839 and 1845 became an important mail terminus and a trans-shipment point for cotton, hides and other agricultural products.³ Steamboats operating from Red River by way of Caddo Lake and Big Cypress had begun "to edge over the East Texas border"⁴ several years earlier, and by the middle 1840s were reaching Jefferson intermittently. This traffic prompted the Congress to establish a customs office at Port Caddo on January 29, 1845, and to name L.H. Mabitt as collector.⁵

This river connection between Harrison County and Shreveport, unsatisfactory as it was because of fluctuating and unpredictable water levels, was of material benefit to planters with goods to ship and receive. However, it left something to be desired by individuals travelling between Marshall and Shreveport. The answer, obviously, was an improved road connecting the two towns and the establishment of a system of public transportation. At this period on the frontier, this could only mean stagecoaches.

While the imperatives of growth and development weighed heavily on the early settlers, dictating their concern for adequate communications with Shreveport (their nearest contact with the United States), they kept another eye turned constantly toward the distant capitol in Austin. Here was the government, as contrasted with the markets to the east, on which their future also depended. Here were the levers of power which could bring good things to a planter aristocracy. Texas newspapers, which devoted columns in each issue to reports of political activity in Austin, were likewise vital to the aspirations of the local citizenry — if only they could receive them on a regular basis.

The reach of Marshall politicians for the Austin levers did not exceed their grasp. By 1865, two Marshall residents, Edward Clark and Pendleton Murrah, served as governors of the state. Another, Louis T. Wigfall, became both a United States and a Confederate senator. A former governor, J.P. Henderson, chose Marshall for his home after leaving Austin and was elected United States senator while living in the city. Asa Willie became an associate justice of the Texas Supreme Court, and L.D. Evans was elected a member of the U.S. House of Representatives while living in the city. And all occurred only two decades after Marshall was incorporated.⁶

Still, though no less concerned with affairs in Austin than their fellows in Marshall, planters in the eastern section of Harrison County never lost sight of the fact that their livelihood and prosperity depended on the market for their cotton in New
Orleans, and thus access to it by river boat. Nor did an early newspaperman confuse the economics and the politics of the problem. The Texas Republican for June 8, 1849, reported

From the exertions being made in this neighboring counties, we have strong hopes that Soda [Caddo] Lake will be, by the commencement of the next season, freed from every obstruction that at present intercepts the navigation . . . Once thoroughly cleaned out, the boats may navigate the lake whenever they can go to Shreveport. The subscriptions for this purpose have already been very liberal. We shall publish next week the names of the subscribers and the amounts subscribed.7

True to his word, R.W. Loughery reported in the Republican's next issue that "Mr. William Perry, of Jefferson, proposes to remove the obstructions to the navigation of the lake" for a contract price of $3,500. The editor noted that "the sum of $2,000 is now about made out by subscribers and others who have promised to lend their assistance." J.B. Webster pledged 50¢ per bale of cotton from the 1849 crop, and other subscriptions ranged from $300 down to $20. Loughery calculated that four feet of water would be added to the lake level by clearing it of obstructions to navigation. "The saving to the farmers by the operation," he wrote, "would, at least, be fifty cents per each bale of cotton exported, and an equivalent on importations." He calculated that the saving would amount to $11,250 per year in Harrison County.9

As county leaders thus exerted themselves in behalf of water transportation, they also moved to secure speedy and reliable land transportation, not only with Shreveport but also with Austin and the towns in between. Loughery was energetic in these latter efforts, and he continued to campaign for expanded service in later years, particularly in connection with a Marshall-to-Austin tie in 1852. It seems likely from the available evidence that the first stagecoach from Shreveport arrived in Marshall in the summer or early fall of 1850. A paragraph reprinted in the "Yesteryear" column of the Marshall News Messenger for October 3, 1958, and attributed to an original publication in 1850 conveyed this information:

We have now [emphasis added] a line of stages from this place to Shreveport, which leaves every Wednesday, Friday and Sunday and returns Monday, Thursday and Saturday evenings. The stage office is at "Uncle Joe's" Hotel. The stage goes through in one day. In connection with this subject we would call attention to the road. Winter is approaching and it is necessary that work should
be done on it in season, otherwise at the time we most need a stage, it cannot travel on this route. \(^{10}\)

Population figures for Marshall and Harrison County in the federal census of 1850 support a conclusion that stagecoach service must have been initiated by that year, though documentation of the first Shreveport-to-Marshall stagecoach link has not yet been discovered. Harrison County was credited with a population of 11,822, making it the most populous county in the state. \(^{11}\) Marshall was shown to have a population of 1,189, making it the seventh largest municipality in the state, while Austin was credited with no more than 629 residents, and Dallas with 430. Marshall's bar already was one of the most respected in the state, and its newspaper was more widely quoted with each succeeding issue. These hardly are characteristics of a community isolated — except for river boats, single mounts and individually owned teams — from its nearest large neighbor.

The stagecoach route from Marshall to Shreveport about which Loughery exercised his editorial prerogatives was less than direct. It left Marshall heading northeast, crossing the present Marshall-Jefferson highway at or near the present intersection of that highway (U.S. 59) and the Harris Lake Road, an eastward extension of Poplar Street. From that point it continued northeast, generally paralleling present Texas Highway 43 (to Karnack) to an intersection nine miles away with a similar road coming into it from Woodlawn, located roughly midway between Marshall and Jefferson. Three miles farther on, the merged routes intersected the Jefferson-Jonesville-Waskom's Station Road, at which point the road turned southeast to the state line, just east of the present Harrison County municipality of Waskom. \(^{12}\)

A 2.7-mile section of this road near its intersection with U.S. 59 survives almost unchanged since the last coach traversed it. Worn and rutted by the iron rims of countless stagecoach wheels and the shod hooves of the horses which supplied the motive power, the road surface in many places is as much as 12 feet below the surrounding countryside. Hardly wide enough for one automobile, the roadway in these places is canopied by adjacent trees which have arched over it from both sides, so that portions of the road are bathed in the half-light of a forest floor. At other places, particularly in the bottoms, the forces of erosion have worked in the road's favor, keeping its surface near the adjacent land level. On the abrupt hills, the soil is a dull red from its iron ore content. In the bottoms it runs more to a tawny sand.

Small spring-fed streams cross the road at several points. Even during severe drought, many of these springs still produce a
trickle of cool, clear water. These streams, when augmented by heavy rainfall, make the road impassable to modern day automobiles. In all likelihood they presented similar difficulties even to the high-bodied stagecoaches which operated on it before a railroad link with Shreveport outmoded this form of transportation.

This old road has become a favorite subject for artists and photographers in recent years. The historic scenes art competition held each year in connection with Marshall's "Stagecoach Days" festival usually attracts one or more entries from out-of-county artists who find the road an irresistible attraction.13

The Marshall editor's complaint about the condition of the road soon after the first stage line began operating was echoed east of the Texas-Louisiana state line. With obvious satisfaction, the editor reported plans for a plank road to be constructed from Shreveport westward to the Texas line "on the route leading to this place."14 The plan called for a plank road not less than 16 feet wide, "which will afford ample room for the passage of wagons; the entire width of the chartered road to be 50 feet . . . ." Capitalization would not exceed $100,000, divided into 2,000 shares at $50 each. Continuing, the newspaper reported that

The number of gates and the rates of toll [are] to be determined upon by the company, but are not to exceed: For a footman, one cent per mile; man and horse, three cents per mile; horses, mules and cattle, per wheel, three cents a mile; hogs and sheep, per head, two cents per mile; wheel vehicles, per wheel, three cents a mile; and an additional three cents for every thousand pounds over five thousand; provided no tolls shall be exacted from any one going to or returning from militia duty; or elections, or to or from court as a juror; or from any one traveling on the business of the state or General Government.15

Despite such plans to improve the roads on which the convenience and prosperity of the settlers depended, complaints continued. A Marshall editor was moved to appeal for a change in the road law:

We understand that the roads leading from Marshall to Shreveport and Henderson and Jefferson need working on. The Shreveport stage driver says that the road from Marshall to the Louisiana line is in a very bad situation. We need an amendment to our road law. It is very defective. We can never expect to have good roads until there is more responsibility created than at present exists. As it is now, it is almost impossible to enforce the requisitions of the road
law. We hope there will be an amendment to the law this session of the Legislature. 16

Movement of passengers, baggage and freight was not the only concern of Marshall and other Harrison County citizens, however. Mail was perhaps equally as important, as evidenced by an editor's comment in a Marshall newspaper:

All of our readers are interested in learning the fate of the petitions sent on to Washington some time ago, asking for a stage route from this place to Austin. A simple glance at the map will suffice to show that such mail facilities are greatly required. The petition sent on met the prompt attention of Senator Rusk. The following letter from that gentleman was addressed to a friend in this place who has handed it to us for publication: Washington, March 22, 1852 - Dear Sir: I received from you a few days since, a petition signed by a large number of your citizens asking for a stage route from Marshall to Nacogdoches, which, together with one of like importance from the citizens of Rusk County, and one from the members of the Legislature, I handed to the Post Master General, with the request that it be complied with. He has ordered an increase of the pay upon the route, of fifty per cent, with authority to the contractor to employ a led horse or a coach at his option. Very respectfully yours, THOS. J. RUSK. 17

Some months later the editor was pleased to give a progress report on Senator Rusk's efforts:

We understand that a new mail route has been established from Austin via Belton, Waco village, Springfield, Fairfield, Palestine, Rusk, Henderson and Marshall to Shreveport. This route, which was numerously petitioned for last spring, we are glad to learn has been established. We are unable to say whether the contract will be to carry the mail in coaches, as petitioned for, or on horseback. At all events, it is a route that was very much needed and we are gratified that through the attention of Gen. Rusk the wishes of the people on the line have been regarded. 18

Step by step, by urgings and exertions—and no doubt in response to a growing market demand—Marshall's connections by stage line with other population centers continued to increase. The Marshall House advertised in 1852 that "Perry's well known livery stable is connected with this house. This stable is still under the charge of M.C. Hynson . . . The Henderson line of stages start from this house three times a week. J.W. Simms." 19 By 1856, William Bradfield was advertising that his four-horse "post coaches" henceforth would operate daily between Shreveport, Marshall and Jefferson. 20 The Henderson Democrat for
November 29, 1856, noted that "Stages leave Marshall and Nacogdoches, tri-weekly, and go through in forty-six hours by way of Henderson."21

Arrival of the stage in Marshall always was an event, especially in the early days of service. It is recalled that the driver would blow a bugle when within half a mile, whereupon business ceased and residents rushed to the spot where passengers debarked and mail was off-loaded. In the early 1850s, the stage office for the Shreveport-Marshall line was operated in the Planter's Hotel, Joseph M. Taylor proprietor, located on the northeast corner of the courthouse square. Upon completion of The Adkins House across the street south, the office was moved to the newer, larger and more luxurious facility. While passengers entertained themselves at the hotel, which had a reputation as the finest west of New Orleans,22 the coach was driven around the block to the livery stable at the corner of East Houston and South Lafayette, where hostlers exchanged teams. For some time there was only one structure on the west side of the square, a double log house in which a Mr. Miller kept a tavern. It is said that when the stage arrived in town, Mr. Miller would come out of his saloon with a large bell, as heavy as he could lift, and with great pride ring the bell between his legs to toll arriving passengers to his establishment.

William Bradfield, along with his son John, appears to have been the most successful stage operator of his time, serving the public of Marshall and Shreveport and of a wide area westward and southwestward. Bradfield's name is the one which appears most frequently in the literature on the subject. As early as 1854, a Marshall newspaper noted that

It will be seen by reference to a card in our advertising columns that Messrs. Bradfield, Compton & Co., have established a line of stages and hacks from Shreveport, by way of Marshall, to Austin, our state capital. A portion of the road is now only supplied with hacks, but we understand from Mr. Bradfield, that the company has a lot of four horse coaches in New Orleans, ready for shipment as soon as the water will permit. This is the most important Stage route in the State, and one which has long been needed. From being the shortest route, it is destined to get a great deal of travel. When in full operation with four horse Coaches and the necessary relay of horses, it is calculated the trip can be made to Austin in four days.24

An advertisement for the Commercial Hotel in Shreveport published in The South-Western of that city on June 6, 1855, noted that "The public is hereby notified that the new and spacious brick Hotel, on Milam Street, in this place has been
leased by the above named proprietor [C.S. Mellett] and is now ready for the reception of boarders and transient persons . . . Seats in the Texas line of Stages [Bradfield’s] for Marshall, Jefferson, Henderson, Tyler, etc., can be secured at all times at the Commercial Hotel.” Bradfield, who owned a plantation in the eastern part of Harrison County, continued to operate his stages between Marshall and Shreveport throughout the period of the Civil War, as will be seen later, and was an individual still remembered in 1889 for his place in the transportation picture many years earlier. A Marshall newspaper noted in that year that “John Bradfield, who helped his father run the stage line here during and right after the war, is here selling hay from his farm near Dallas.”

A major development in Marshall’s growth as a transportation center came in 1858 when the Butterfield Overland Express extended its service from Marshall to San Diego, California. John Butterfield was a stagecoach driver in Albany, New York, in the early 1800s. Within 25 years he had risen to the ownership of a large network of stage lines and was active in the development of telegraph lines and railroads. He merged his company with American Express in 1850 but returned to his early love for the stagecoach when he organized the Butterfield Overland Express in 1857. Although this company operated only until 1861, travelling the “southern route” to the West, it left an indelible mark on history with the route’s identification as the Butterfield Trail. With the route extended westward from Marshall, it was possible for Harrison County residents and others reaching Marshall from the eastern states on William Bradfield’s Marshall-Shreveport stage to cross the continent to the Pacific Ocean. It must have been a heady sensation for a community which only two years later would rank as the fourth largest municipality in Texas.

Editor Loughery’s concern for stagecoaches as his access to much of the news was lessened to a degree in 1854, though this facet of communications did not reduce the requirements of his readers for public transportation. In that year Marshall became the first city in Texas to be served by “magnetic telegraph.” Texas Telegraph Company was chartered on January 5, 1854, and by February 14 had brought its line from Shreveport to Marshall. Using trees and poles as support, the wire was completed to Marshall and an office opened in the city on St. Valentine’s Day, much to the gratification of Mr. Loughery:

The Magnetic Telegraph is at length in operation between Marshall and New Orleans. We are no longer cut off from the balance of the world by low water and slow mails. Who
will now wait a week for intelligence from New Orleans, when by taking a Marshall paper they can get intelligence from the city of the day previous? Throughout the day the office was thronged with visitors. In the course of two hours twenty dollars had been received.\textsuperscript{27}

The editor’s satisfaction was not unmitigated, however. Service was frequently interrupted. Wind whipped the trees and broke the attached wires. Wagoners pulled up the poles and used them for pries or firewood. Vandals did further damage.\textsuperscript{28} Finally, the company collapsed in December 1855, and it was not until 1859 that E.B. Cushing of the Houston \textit{Telegraph and Texas Register} secured the interest and financial backing of a group of Houston newspaper and railroad men to resurrect the defunct company and restore service over a portion of the system.\textsuperscript{29}

In spite of poor roads and other impediments, by 1860 Harrison County was served by a number of lines in addition to the original Marshall-Shreveport connection, operating over as many as eight stagecoach roads radiating from the city like spokes from the hub of a wheel.\textsuperscript{30} Service had multiplied, but not the comfort of the passengers. Stages still lurched, shuddered over potholes, and jolted their passengers in other diabolical ways. They were hot in summer, cold in winter. Their schedules were more a matter of promise than performance, and such schedules as were maintained often required night travel, making for poor sleeping. And they were expensive.

In view of discomfort, schedule uncertainties and the ticket tariff, it is surprising that the lines carried as many passengers as they did. Presumably typical, the Forest Mail Stage Line advertised in 1859 the following price schedule: from Marshall to Jefferson, \$2; to Daingerfield, \$5; to Mt. Pleasant, \$7; and to Clarksville, \$12. The advertisement continued:

The above lines will run in connection with the Shreveport stage and railroad and Henderson and Tyler stages and in connection with the Clarksville and Western stages. The stages depart from Marshall every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 4 o’clock a.m., arriving in Jefferson in time to take the Shreveport stages. No seat will be considered secure until paid for. All bundles, packages, and parcels, must be pre-paid, or they will not be taken; fifty pounds of baggage allowed each passenger. One hundred and fifty pounds extra baggage will be charged the same as one passenger, and a lesser or greater quantity charge in the same proportions. R.W. Nesmith, Proprietor.\textsuperscript{31}

By 1861, the Forest Line found it necessary to increase its charges: “Owing to the unprecedented scarcity of forage through
this section of country, and the high prices therefrom the proprietors of this line deem it absolutely essential to protect their own as well as the interest of the Government, in the Post Office Department, to raise the price of fares on this line." The charge to Jefferson was increased to $2.50; to Daingerfield, $6.50; to Mt. Pleasant, $8.50; and to Clarksville, $14.50. The announcement noted that the line "connects with Bradfield's stage at Jonesville, by the Southern Pacific Railroad, and thence can be put from Clarksville, Texas, to Vicksburg, on the Mississippi, in four days and a half, and will receive all attention to their wants and comfort."'

The Civil War placed new strains on the system of stage lines serving Marshall. At a time when movement between Austin and points in the eastern theaters was increasingly essential, stage lines were subjected to problems of reduced manpower, competition for horses and forage, and other dislocations associated with a wartime economy. Nevertheless, stages continued to operate in spite of all difficulties, as evidenced by a number of contemporary accounts.

James Arthur Lyon Fremantle, a Coldstream Guards officer who visited both the Confederate and Union armies while on an extended leave from his regiment in England, left an account of his busman's holiday including his experience with Texas stagecoaches while travelling from Mexico through Marshall to the eastern battlefields. On May 6, 1863, Lt. Col. Fremantle left Crockett in the company of a Louisiana judge, a government agent and an ex-boatswain off the Harriett Lane. He wrote that

We arrived at Rusk at 6:30 P.M., and spent a few hours there; but notwithstanding the boasted splendor of the beds at the Cherokee Hotel, and although by Major 's influence I got one to myself, yet I did not consider its aspect sufficiently inviting to induce me to remove my clothes.

Fremantle started from Rusk at 1:30 A.M., May 7, in a smaller coach carrying himself, the Louisiana judge, a Mississippi planter, the ex-boatswain, the government agent, and a Captain Williams of the Texas Rangers. The Coldstream Guards officer recorded that

All the villages through which we passed were deserted except for women and very old men. Their aspect was most melancholy. The country is sandy, and the land not fertile, but the timber is fine. We met several planters on the road, who with their families and Negroes were taking refuge in Texas, after having abandoned their plantations in
Louisiana on the approach of Banks. One of them had as many as sixty slaves with him of all ages and sizes. At 7:00 P.M. the passengers were joined by "three huge, long-legged, unwashed, odoriferous Texan soldiers, and we passed a wretched night in consequence."

The stage crossed the Sabine River at 11:30 P.M. and reached Marshall at 3:00 A.M. Friday, May 8, 1863. Fremantle recorded that "we got four hours' sleep there" — undoubtedly at The Adkins House — before "We... got into a railroad for sixteen miles, after which we were crammed into another stage. Crossed the frontier into Louisiana at 11:00 A.M. I have therefore been nearly a month getting through the single state of Texas. Reached Shreveport at 3 P.M., and, after washing for the first time in five days, I called on General Kirby Smith, who commands the whole country on this side of the Mississippi."34

There appears little question that Fremantle spent his few recuperative hours in Marshall at The Adkins House, inasmuch as its owner, George Adkins, had unsuccessfully attempted to close its doors several times earlier, and the hostelry is known to have operated throughout the war. Adkins was one of the earliest Harrison County settlers, had served as its first judge, and was the builder of a number of its early buildings. Of his difficulties in the first years of the war, a Marshall editor recorded that

Owing to the dullness of the times, Judge Adkins, of this place, has endeavored several times to close his hotel, the Adkins House, and every time the attempt has been made the result has proved a failure. Wednesday he was not be foiled, so he posted a sign up, with glowing letters, "Hotel Closed." The doors of the building were shut, and the house looked almost deserted. But it was no go. The Henderson stage brought a host of passengers, all clever, nice people, and among them several ladies. Of course, the judge said he was bound to open his house to the ladies. We would advise him to keep it open. If he does not, strangers may possibly think the town dull.35

Perhaps the most notable record of stagecoach operations through Marshall was left by W.W. Heartsill, who kept a journal of his war service beginning April 19, 1861, and ending with a final entry dated May 20, 1865. His service ranged from the western frontier to Tennessee and included a period in a Union prison at Camp Butler, near Springfield, Illinois. Because of this wide area of service, which also included time as a guard at Camp Ford, the Confederate war prisoner installation at Tyler, Heartsill was in and out of Marshall more often than otherwise would have been
normal. *Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army*, the printed version of the journal (for which Heartsill set the type and did the press work after the war), contains frequent references to stagecoaches and to William Bradfield, a personal friend. A random selection includes these entries:

August 30, 1862: Lieut. Ragsdale requested me to go to Monroe, La., to see into the condition of the Captain [Samuel Richardson]. I ride over to Jonesville and there take the stage, at 4 o'clock I arrive at Shreveport, in an hour I am on the Monroe stage, and at one o'clock A.M. we meet the Shreveport stage near Minden, I find Capt. R. is aboard, so I change coaches and reach Shreveport at 9 o'clock.

December 21, 1863: After an early, and a good breakfast, one of Maj. Bradfield's fine coaches rolls up, engineered by that prince of drivers, Joe White. Elgin and I get aboard, and AT THREE O'CLOCK, DEC. 21st, 1863, we roll into the "City of Sand" (Marshall).

April 14, 1864: [Camp Ford] By the stage we have additional information concerning our losses in the Mansfield and Pleasant Hill battles of the 8th and 9th Inst.

May 5, 1864: [Camp Ford] The stage comes in overloaded with news, and as a specimen of what RELIABLE persons are bringing over, I will give a few samples of the latest to day: No. 1, Lee and Grant has had a fight, and Lee has taken from eight to fifteen thousand prisoners . . .

With the completion by the Southern Pacific of the rail link between Shreveport and Marshall after the Civil War, the stagecoach road between the two cities ceased to serve its primary function. Stagecoaches continued to operate out of Marshall for a number of years, however. Dr. Dorman Winfrey noted that in 1867, "the stage from Marshall to Huntsville passes through Henderson three times a week." A Marshall newspaper reported in 1868 that "there is a very excellent stage line from this place to Jefferson, which leaves Marshall every day, Mondays excepted, and returns in the evening. The same stage line extends to Clarksville and from thence to Bryan City by way of Waco. The proprietors of this line are also running a line of stages from Marshall to Navasota, by way of Henderson, Rusk, Crockett and Huntsville." Another newspaper reported in 1869 that

We noticed several weeks ago, that Messrs. William Bradfield & Co., had established a direct stage line from Marshall to Dallas. This is a convenience that has long
been required, and our only surprise is that it was not inaugurated years ago. At present the trip is made through in four days. After the first of May this line will carry the mail, and will make the trip in three days and without any night travel. The distances travelled are as follows: from Marshall to Tyler, 65 miles; from Tyler to Canton, 40 miles; from Canton to Prairieville, 16 miles; Prairieville to Kaufman, 16 miles; from Kaufman to Dallas, 36 miles. When we get our railroad completed the entire distance can be travelled in eight hours.  

But the day of the stagecoach was passing. The stage road between Marshall and Shreveport fell into disuse after a rail link was completed. The stage line westward from Marshall disappeared, as had the buffalo earlier, when the Texas & Pacific completed its tracks to Dallas. The most popular form of public conveyance in its time, now perceived with a romantic aura for the innumerable motion pictures in which it has figured, the stagecoach was in truth a dirty, sweaty, chilling, often dangerous alternate to the less attractive use of horse or horsedrawn vehicle for long distance travel. Its successor, the iron horse, likewise has in its own turn almost disappeared from the scene, giving way to the convenience and the speed of personal automobiles and scheduled aircraft.

Yet a segment of Harrison County's old stagecoach road survives as an artifact from an earlier time. An official Texas Historical Commission marker assures a memory of a simpler way of life, when a bugle blast announced the arrival of the stagecoach in Marshall and residents closed their businesses to welcome passengers and mail.

NOTES

1The quotation is from the minister's Western Sketch Book, published in 1850, in which he recounted a three-month stay in Northeast Texas. Surveyors, in establishing the international boundary, erected a series of granite shafts on which the letters U.S. were incised on the east side and R.T. on the west side. Only one of these still stands. Set on April 23, 1841, it is located on the 32nd degree of longitude about 100 feet off Texas Highway 31 near Logansport, Louisiana. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. See also Thomas F. Ruffin, "The Elusive East Texas Border," East Texas Historical Journal, Vol. XI. No. 1. 1973.

2A copy of this letter is in the archives of the Harrison County Historical Museum in Marshall.


5Hackney, Port Caddo.
6James Harper Starr also selected Marshall as his home after serving as secretary of the treasury of the Republic of Texas and as the Confederacy's Trans-Mississippi postmaster-general, with virtually autonomous authority while conducting the affairs of his department from headquarters in Marshall.

7The Texas Republican had begun publication in Marshall earlier in 1849 and quickly became one of the most widely quoted and most highly respected newspapers in the state.

8A planter in the Leigh community, John B. Webster reported 160 acres of improved farm land, 19 slaves and 34 bales of cotton from the 1849 crop in the federal census of 1850. Ten years later, he had increased his holdings to $16,678 worth of real property, including 1,100 acres of improved farm land, and personal property including 75 slaves, worth $54,400. His 1859 cotton crop totaled 203 bales. Randolph B. Campbell, “Planters and Plain Folk: Harrison County, Texas, as a Test Case, 1850-1860,” The Journal of Southern History, Vol. XL, No. 3, August 1974.

9The lake never was completely or satisfactorily cleared. In fact, removal of The Great Raft in Red River after the Civil War reduced the level of water in the lake to a point that river traffic became impossible. Port Caddo disappeared, as a consequence, and survives only as a place name.

10The use of the word “now” introduces a degree of uncertainty as to how long the line may have been operating before the newspaper notice. However, this is the best evidence so far discovered bearing on the start of service into Marshall.

11If Charles DeMorse’s estimate of “about 500” in 1842 can be credited, this total represents an increase in population of more than 2,300 percent in eight years.

12Map, Harrison County Historical Herald, Vol. 1, No. 4, April-May 1974. This issue was inserted as a special tabloid section of the Marshall News Messenger in connection with the 1974 observance of Stagecoach Days, the city’s annual historical festival.

13A large color photograph of a section of the road was presented to Marshall High School by the MHS class of 1928 when it held its 50th anniversary reunion in May 1978. Among members of the class attending the reunion was Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson, widow of the late president.

14Reprinted in the issue of the Marshall News Messenger for February 6, 1959, and contributed to an original publication in February 1852.

15The author has discovered no evidence that construction of this road ever was initiated, or, for that matter, that the road was intended for stagecoach use. The proposal does indicate, however, the importance attached at this period to adequate transportation facilities.

16“Yesteryear” column, Marshall News Messenger, reprinting from November 1852.

17Ibid., April 18, 1960, from April 1852.

18Ibid., November 15, 1963, from November 1852.

19Ibid., November 5, 1963, from November 1852.

20Ibid., from an 1856 issue.

21Dorman H. Winfrey, A History of Rusk County, Texas (Waco, 1961), 32.

22After the Civil War, the name was changed to Capitol Hotel as a memorial to three Trans-Mississippi Department governor’s conferences held therein during the war.

23Scrapbook, Mrs. Charles A. Beehn, Harrison County Historical Museum.

24“Yesteryear” column, Marshall News Messenger, December 4, 1960, from December 1854. The reference to the water level in the Red River-Caddo Lake-Big
Cypress system makes it plain that reliance could not be placed on river transportation.

25Ibid., 1954.


29Dillon, "The Arrival of the Telegraph in Texas."

30Map, Harrison County Historical Herald, op. cit.


32Ibid., May 7, 1961, from 1861.

33Rail service in Harrison County before the Civil War was limited to a line which the Southern Pacific Railroad (in no way connected with the modern company) operated from Swanson's Landing on the south shore of Caddo Lake southwest 12 miles to Jonesville, then eight miles west to Scottsville, and finally five miles west to within one mile of Marshall. Between August 1863 and June 1864, and with the assistance of the Confederate army, the rails between Caddo Lake and Jonesville were picked up and relaid from Scottsville to Greenwood, Louisiana, 14 miles west of Shreveport. The rail link between Marshall and Shreveport was not completed until after the war. Letter, January 5, 1951, Arthur L. Carnahan, chief railroad accountant, Railroad Commission of Texas, to O.H. Clark, president, First National Bank, Marshall.


36Quotations are from W.W. Heatstall, Fourteen Hundred and 91 Days in the Confederate Army. A Journal Kept by W.W. Heartstall for Four Years, One Month and One Day, or Camp Life, Day by Day, of the W.P. Lane Rangers, from April 19th 1861 to May 20th, 1865, reprinted by McCowat-Mercer Press (Jackson, Tennessee), 1954.

37See Note 33 above.

38Winfrey, Rusk County.

39"Yesteryear" column, undated, Marshall News Messenger, from 1868, clipping in Harrison County Historical Museum.

40Ibid., 1958, from 1869.