

# 1845 Cultural Nexus in Transportation & Communication: Express, Rail Road, Telegraph & the Post Office

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## Introduction

In 1845, postal reform, dubbed “Cheap Postage,”<sup>1</sup> coincided with the Annexation of Texas and war with Mexico, dubbed “Manifest Destiny.” Railroad men, bankers, telegraph promoters, land speculators, expressmen and, of course, politicians who worried about new states, whether slave or free - they were all fixed upon the huge sales of public lands and the human movement to fill them. The postal system followed the frontier; each new court house was given a post office and put upon a post road. In 1832, even as public land sales were growing exponentially,<sup>2</sup> Postmaster General William T. Barry increased postal transportation by 50% - to anticipate the system which would be necessary for the service of such an expanded domain.

Emigrants to the New World at this time mainly arrived at the port of New York. There was no government supervision or regulation to deal with the special cases of impoverishment and debilitation that accompanied these mass migrations, whose fate could very much depend upon the kindness of strangers. This entrepreneurial niche was soon filled by emigrant agents who arranged for through transportation from Europe to a destination in the West. From the port of New York, steamboat would serve most emigrants for the first 150 miles of their trip, up the Hudson estuary to Albany.

Albany, capital of the Empire State, was the gateway to the West through the Mohawk Valley, served to Buffalo since 1823 by the Erie Canal. Since 1831, railroads had been projected westward, with the Mohawk and Hudson carrying passengers between Albany and Schenectady, followed in 1833 by the chartering of the Utica and Schenectady for Erastus Corning. He early envisioned a connected rail line all the way west to Buffalo. Expressman would naturally help fill the gaps in this emergent line of transportation.

Expressmen were peculiarly American – a private entrepreneurial response to the need for secure, dedicated, transmission of physical objects. Investment in the express business began with the dissolution of the second Bank of the United States in 1836.<sup>3</sup> Without centralized accountability each local bank had to develop a courier service for the exchange of financial paper. Expressmen filled this gap and became couriers for a network of banks. They took advantage of the Post Office Department’s dedication to accommodating the traveler,<sup>4</sup> and rode as passengers along with the daily mails on routes served by six-horse stage coaches. In effect, the expressmen operated entrepreneurially and the post office systematically over the same lines.

William F. Harnden (in 1839 the first to characterize himself as an Express Package Courier) pioneered an express business<sup>5</sup> which would fill in ‘gaps’ in postal communication: the transmission of heavy packets (anything over three pounds was unmailable), the forwarding of foreign mail,<sup>6</sup> and even the carrying of letter mail as an auxiliary to the posts.<sup>7</sup> He also pioneered an emigrant business in 1842, recognizing that prospective settlers needed a trustworthy agent to arrange for transportation of themselves and their baggage to promised lands.<sup>8</sup>

Though the expressman might be seen as an opportunist, the Livingston family entertained a larger vision, and invested in several arms of the emergent systems of transportation and communication.

## The Archive

Reproduced in the appendix to this paper, in chronological order, are sixteen previously unpublished letters dated September 1844 to December 1845, and directed to Erastus Corning primarily by Crawford Livingston.<sup>9</sup> In all, they represent a conversation within the complexities of the 1845 postal reforms.

In 1844, as the correspondence began, Crawford Livingston was maneuvering to compete directly with Harnden. Livingston was a young (thirty-three years old) scion of the powerful Livingston Manor clan, who operated as a capitalist out of offices on Wall Street in New York City – Number 2 was for his express business; numbers 8 and 10 for his Emigrant Agency.<sup>10</sup> Livingston’s partners in the express business were Henry Wells and George E. Pomeroy. Livingston’s older brother William Alexander Livingston was teamed with the expressman William Fargo, headed from Buffalo to St. Louis. A cousin, Robert Cambridge Livingston, was early involved in The American Telegraph Company. Another cousin, Johnston Livingston, began by managing expressmen in the vicinity of Philadelphia and would stay in the express business over sixty years, carrying the enterprise if not the family name to California.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 1: Crawford Livingston’s confidential letter [letter #11] to Erastus Corning, written on printed letterhead – with the family coat of arms, and the number on Wall Street left blank. The Foreign Agency was also operated out of number 8, and Livingston, Wells & Pomeroy’s express out of number 2.**

Erastus Corning, who would turn fifty in December 1844, was a powerful selfmade man. He had been mayor of Albany and, at this time, was a regent of the state university and a state senator. Despite having been crippled in an accident as a boy, he energetically expanded an uncle’s Albany hardware business into one of the largest iron mills in the country. In a spirit of vertical integration, he purchased iron mines and patented railway spikes. He became a trustee of the first passenger railroad in the country, the Mohawk & Hudson. To finance the building of the Utica & Schenectady Rail Road in 1833 he founded the Albany City Bank. In general, railroads were backed by capitalists to profit their own cities and so were not naturally disposed to making through connections.<sup>12</sup> Corning, however, was committed to a single railroad line throughout New York State, which made him a powerful ally of both the express and the post office.<sup>13</sup>

### **Livingston, Wells & Pomeroy and the Emigrant Business**

George Pomeroy, based in Albany, was a western freight and passenger forwarder, arranging for travel to Buffalo and beyond via complicated stage and rail connections.<sup>14</sup> In 1841, Henry Wells was also based in Albany as a Harnden forwarding agent, handling traffic from New York City and from Boston. Wells proposed to have Pomeroy also run a package express service between Albany and Buffalo.<sup>15</sup> Livingston agreed to back this venture and the three men became partners.

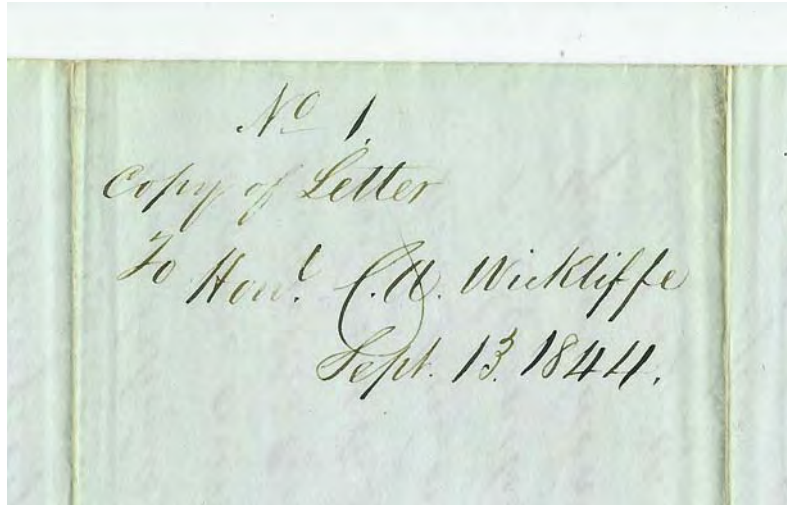
Harnden & Co. had exclusive rights to arrange for emigrant passage on the Erie Canal, and in letter number #1, undated, Pomeroy announced to Corning that Livingston, Wells & Pomeroy were going to compete directly with Harnden in the emigrant business by establishing a New York office, and would advertise all the alternative routes that connected with Corning’s railroad. ... *as I am acquainted with nearly all the stage proprietors and personally acquainted with all the side routes and steam boat captains on both lakes and having the advantage of our own local agents we could offer great inducement to the traveler to call at our office where we will furnish the tickets and information, accounting to you for receipts as you shall direct.*<sup>16</sup>

In letter #6 of 15 October 1844 to Corning, Livingston tried to impugn the trustworthiness of Harnden who, he understood, was about to make some application for their immigrant passenger business on your Roads.<sup>17</sup> Harnden might gain *stability, credit & the confidence of Emigrants* by advertising arrangements with western

railroads, but he would be less attentive than Livingston to the interests of the railroads, switching all traffic to the canal come summer.

### Livingston, Wells & Pomeroy and a Foreign Mail Agency

Livingston sent Corning copies of his 1844 correspondence with Postmaster General C.A. Wickliffe (letters #3, #4, #5) to reassure him of his commitment to operate within the law in preparation for Corning's meeting in Auburn of the several Western New York railroads, to determine contractual arrangements with Livingston, Wells & Pomeroy. The letters, however, also reveal Livingston's ambition to compete with Harnden<sup>18</sup> to operate as an agent to forward mail to foreign destinations. Livingston's company already had foreign agencies for their own express business, and could serve the Post Office Department in the absence of postal conventions. On 13 September (letter #3), he suggested to Wickliffe that he could actually help the Post Office Department capture lost revenue:



**Figure 2: Erastus Corning's docket notation for Crawford Livingston's first letter to Postmaster General Wickliffe [letter #3].**

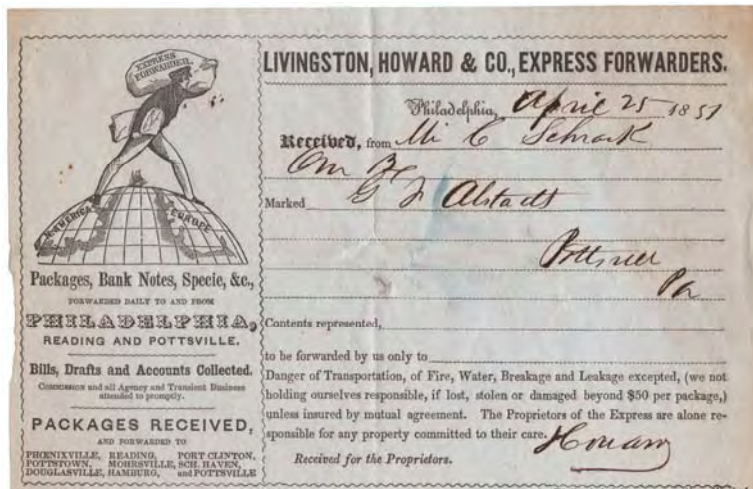
*I am very willing to pay to the Post Office Department the usual rates of Postage on all such letters, less the ordinary commission which it would be fair to allow me, the latter might be governed by the pro-rata commissions allowed to Post Masters.*

*I think I could thus turn many letters into the channel which would pay the usual rates to the Government; instead of reaching me by private hand as at present. I am entirely certain that such an arrangement would subserve public convenience to a great degree.*

He followed up in his letter of 5 October (letter #5):

*Before closing I would suggest whether it would not comport with the laws of Congress ... to allow me to receive letters for Foreign ports ... until the arrangements of the Department are completed and even afterward if the public should wish to avail of my agencies abroad. Might it not be within the spirit of the act of Congress (which has the greatest public convenience in view) to use my existing arrangements in the premises, under your direction? I should scarcely dare to refer to this again did I not know that certain parties (for convenience sake) prefer to use my Foreign agencies to any other even at larger expense.*

An 1845 law passed at the same time as the postal reforms provided for the beginning of Post Office Department, arrangements for foreign mail forwarding.<sup>19</sup>



**Figure 3: A receipt used in 1851 but printed earlier for Johnston Livingston’s express in Philadelphia – promoting their capacity to forward packages to Europe.**

### Livingston & Wells separate from Pomeroy

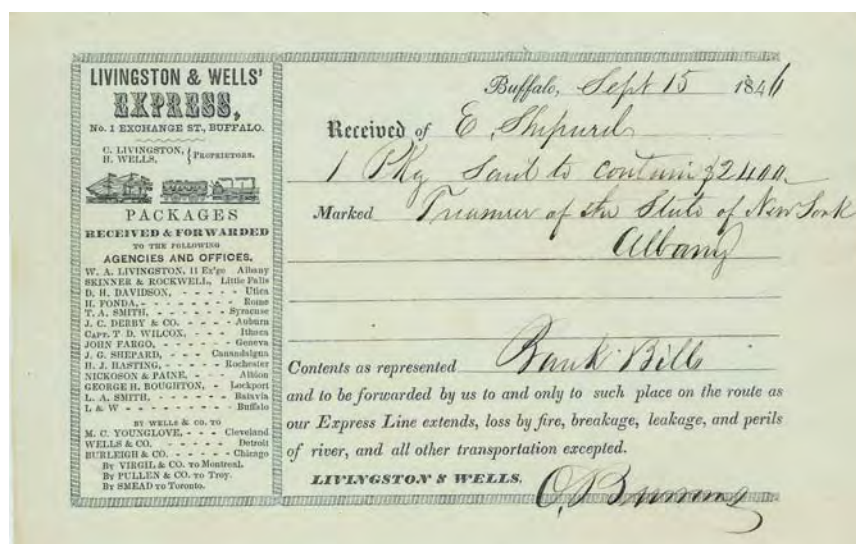
After the reform laws were passed, but before they were effective, Livingston announced to Corning (letter #10) that Pomeroy had accepted a buy-out offer and that plans were to send him on permanent foreign express duty in Liverpool. To achieve credibility with the Post Office Department, it had become critical that Livingston distance himself from Pomeroy. Sometime in 1844, Pomeroy had decided on his own to begin a letter express to compete with the post office. Postage on letters from New York to Buffalo was 25 cents – Pomeroy first advertised he would carry them for 6 cents and then brought out printed labels which were 5 cents if 20 were bought at a time. Inasmuch as Livingston, Wells & Pomeroy had a franchise with Corning’s Utica & Schenectady Rail Road to run an express service, Livingston wished Corning to get his Board’s approval of dropping Pomeroy as a partner. In letter #2 Livingston revealed the plan of offering to buy out Pomeroy’s share in the business but, if that should fail, to reorganize the business without Pomeroy’s flaunting his disregard of the POD monopoly on the carriage of letter mail.<sup>20</sup>

In Livingston’s first communication (letter #3) with PMG Wickliffe he emphasized his probity, citing Corning as a reference:

*I have most earnestly and strenuously (as a member of the house of Livingston, Wells & Pomeroy) and from the beginning, objected to the carrying of letters by the Express, considered simply as a matter of interest. I have felt that I should best subserve it by obeying the laws, however onerous such laws might be, I have felt that the public confidence in me as an Express proprietor would not be lessened by such a course, whether these have been and are my views, I can appeal to the Honl. Erastus Corning, the president of the Utica and Schenectady Rail Road Company and to my Partners and agents in the Express.*

Livingston followed up (letter #5) to Wickliffe with assurances that Pomeroy had acted alone in his illegal letter express and against the essential interests of the Company which depended upon public confidence.

*In addition to this, my real interest was and is strongly against a collision with the Post Office laws. My strength as an Express agent, is in the Public confidence, not in popular applause; and a disregard of the laws would justly appear as evidence of the want of that strict integrity which the Banks, Brokers & others who employ me, require. Even the arrest of a messenger is derogatory to the high character which it is my fixed determination that my Express shall maintain.*



**Figure 4: A receipt for Livingston & Wells' Express after they bought out Pomeroy. William A. Livingston is their agent in Albany. Here they carried \$2400 in bank bills from Buffalo to the Treasurer of New York state in Albany.**

### Livingston & Wells Interception of Illegal Mail

In addition to ridding the company of Pomeroy, Livingston pledged to join the post office in seeking to detect illegally-carried letters. Wickliffe, himself, had determined that the express business was seriously eroding the profits of the Post Office Department.<sup>21</sup> Livingston reported to Wickliffe (letter #4) that he had circulated to all his express agents strict instructions about not accepting parcels which they suspected of containing letters. Apparently, in response to the earlier communication (letter #3) that emphasized his willingness to aid in the interception of illegal mail, Wickliffe had proposed more diligence.

*In obedience to your wishes, as intimated in your favor 23<sup>rd</sup> ulto, I now propose to put forth additional measures, if any can be devised, to prevent the possibility of my Express being used for the illegal purpose under notice; and if any thing occurs to you in relation to it, I shall esteem it a favor if you will suggest the same to me. In the meantime, I shall immediately address still stronger prohibiting letters to my messengers and agents; and advertise the public in every possible way of my continued purpose.*

*I feel disposed to act in connection with the Post Master General to detect anyone who may clandestinely use my Express in the illegal transmission of letters; and shall do myself the honor to submit a proposition to you by the next mail to this effect, together with other considerations which I will not now trouble you with.*

Livingston's idea was that the post office hire a special agent – someone who had the trust of postmasters, but who was not known to be a postal employee (letter #5). The gentleman he had in mind was Lewis Eaton, who had been Sheriff of Schenectady County in 1821 and served in the House of Representatives in 1823, so knew Washington politics. It is apparent that Livingston was already using Eaton to gather intelligence for him.<sup>22</sup>

Accordingly, Livingston met with First Assistant Postmaster General Selah R. Hobbie<sup>23</sup> first in New York City and then in Washington – *to silence all further complaints about the letter carrying of my Express* (letter #7). Both Hobbie and Eaton agreed that Livingston did not have the right to break a seal on suspicious parcels – so he reiterated his idea of a secret agent, confident that Wickliffe would follow through. By 31 October 1844 (letter #8) Livingston could hint to Corning that Wickliffe seemed ready to hire Eaton as secret agent, and reported that his own attempts to stamp out private carriage of letters by other companies had born fruit.

Eaton actually wrote Corning, himself, on 12 November 1844 (letter #9) to emphasize that Livingston was held in high regard in the Post Office Department, and contractual arrangements should be made in his name: *it would be better for your Company as well as the P. O. Department to have Mr. Livingston alone responsible instead of two or three partners.*

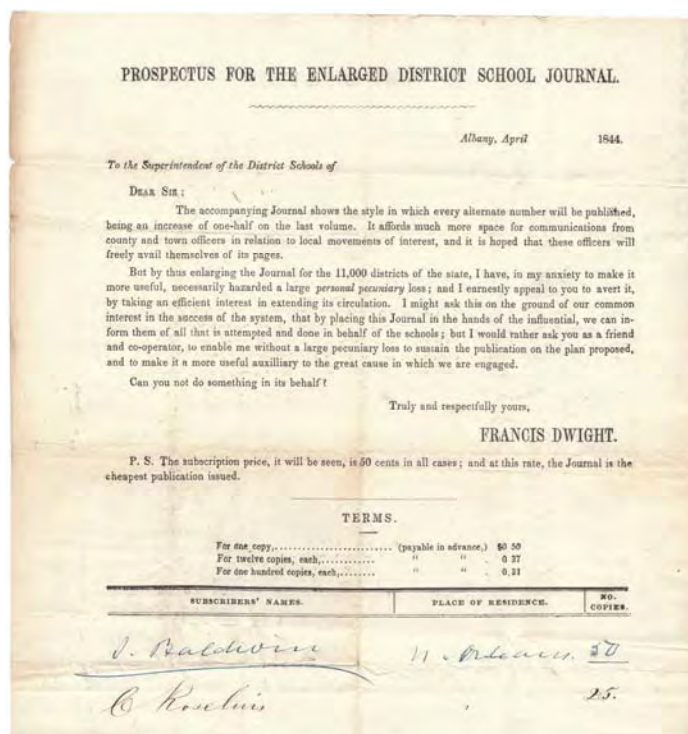
Livingston had confided in Corning on 22 October (letter #7) that he was risking both profits and the ill will of the business community in strongly allying himself with both the railroads and the post office. He hoped that: *a corresponding protection from both will be readily extended toward me, in my regular & legitimate business.*

### Railroad Postal Contracts

The four-year contracts for carrying mail in New York and New England were advertised and bid in 1844 under the old law, and the bidders believed that the former system of compensation was in force. However, the postal reform laws of 1845<sup>24</sup> changed several aspects, and they were made retroactive upon the recent contract lettings. The new three-tiered rates (\$300, \$100, \$50 per mile per year) for compensating railroads would effectively reduce the dollar amount per mile for the Utica and Schenectady Rail Road from \$200 to \$100. A reference to the Southern Rail Road in letter #14 from Eaton to Corning, in August when contract negotiations were still stalled, indicates the imbalance: a trunk line south of Washington was compensated at \$300 – which was princely considered how few passengers used the route – whereas a branching but very busy line like Corning’s could earn more from passengers than from mail at \$100 a mile/year.

The reform law no longer specified what mode of horse transportation needed to be employed on a particular route and schedule. Stage coach owners were especially hard hit, as they no longer enjoyed a separate compensation category. Passengers were going to naturally gravitate to the railroads, and freight as well as mail might be carried by a less expensive wagon. Moreover, the post office would no longer require that a succeeding contractor ‘purchase out’ their stock. Stage mail carriers like John Butterfield (who was partnered with Crawford Livingston in the building of a telegraph across New York state) didn’t again bid on New York contracts and moved West.

Livingston, and any “wide-awake” American, could be quite sure that a reduction in postage would increase the number of letters in the mails.<sup>25</sup> Great Britain had introduced the Penny Post in 1840 and reported the number of letters doubled in three years.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, after Barry doubled the number of miles covered by postal routes in 1832 it took just two years for the mails, themselves, to double. What concerned the railroads, and the expressmen as freight agents, more was an increase in newspapers and periodicals (letter #11). By the new postal law, newspapers sent under thirty miles were to be carried for free in the mails, and the rate, for magazines and unbound books, reduced.<sup>27</sup> Railroads were left with the uncertainty of not knowing the bulk of a particular mail and risked sacrificing passenger space.



**Figure 5: A subscription prospectus circulated from Albany in April of 1844 anticipates the postal reform law by dramatically increasing the size of the journal and lowering its price – possible because such local newspapers would be carried free in the mails.**

The new law also seemed to permit Special Agents,<sup>28</sup> so Livingston still hoped that Eaton would be hired, perhaps to work for the railroads as well.

Incoming President James Polk appointed a new PMG, Cave Johnson, who seemed recalcitrant about many things. In letter #12, Livingston was scathing about Johnson's plan to run the mails without contracts with the railroads. Johnson as a slave state Democrat opposed the aggressive commercialization – along with Northern Abolitionist propaganda - that postal reform promised.<sup>29</sup> He was also deeply conservative when it came to the budget; Eaton believed Johnson's parsimony was reflected in public opinion. But Livingston was sure that the public, now accustomed to railway travel, would not stand for their mails to be returned to primitive horse and wagon.

*Genl Eaton is also inclined to the firm opinion that the PM Genl will run by Horse power his letter mail, viz letters only by light wagon & the heavier bulky parts in stage coaches.*

*I think this idea entirely too absurd for any PM Genl to even risk his reputation upon, to save the paltry sum of some \$200 per miles per anni, on the transportation f the great Western Mail, from Alby to Buffalo.*

*Should PMG Johnson attempt this measure, I predict, he will soon learn, that the people know their rights and how to protect them.*

*There would very soon be no necessity for his mail, and he might very safely transfer it to a saddle bag for horseback conveyance.*

In the absence of a contract between the railroads and the POD, Eaton was bold enough to suggest in August (letter #14) that Corning allow Livingston & Wells to carry the mails indirectly over his railroad for however long the stalemate lasted: *by allowing the Express to make the contract & transport the mails under a modification of their present contract with you, the [railroad] company do not yield to the terms of the [Post Office] Department & their offer stands unimpaired for future negotiation.*<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 6: Special agent Lewis Eaton writing from Buffalo, 4 August 1845 [letter #14] and paying 10 cents new postage as the distance between Buffalo and Albany was just over 300 miles. Before 1 July it would have cost 25 cents.**

### **Baggage vs Freight**

The 1833 corporate charter for the Utica and Schenectady Rail Road from the state of New York, and for the protection of its investment in the Erie Canal, denied the railroad the right to carry freight. When this proscription was lifted late in 1844 (though for the period of navigation<sup>31</sup> the rail road would have to pay the equivalent of canal tolls to the state) Livingston applied to Corning to become his freight agent as well as for the express and the passengers. However, freight was restricted to freight trains that deferred in schedule and speed to passenger trains.

The locked valises of the expressmen were considered baggage and they were allowed on passenger trains. The locked mail bags of the Post Office Department also rode on passenger trains. Prior to the postal reforms of 1845, the express still had a competitive edge in carrying packets which could be accompanied by one letter

referring strictly to the contents. Since posted letters were rated by the sheet of paper, and by distance, enclosing a banknote in a letter, for instance, was prohibitively expensive. The rate of 5 cents per half ounce under 300 miles provided by the 1845 reform, however, allowed for banknote or other enclosures. Moreover, new stipulations that packages or bundles of banknotes could contain **no** letter and that packets of mailable matter **must** be carried by the post office more strictly limited the domain in which the Express could operate.

Letter #15 of 6 August 1845 provides details of some of Livingston's frustrations over freight (apparently a Western Rail Road agent, Darrow, had sent a box of fish, which was clearly freight, on a passenger train but unaccompanied by a passenger. Theoretically, such fish should have been sent by Express).<sup>32</sup> Livingston wished Corning to back the interests of the expressmen:

*By giving Mr. Darrow orders to discontinue taking Packages on ft. or Baggage unaccompanied by a Passenger, it must, it would, put a stop to it, unless it still went by the Baggage men, and I am told they run this class of Fr't over the Mohawk road on its local trains & get it into the Utica Co's Baggage Wagon on the night run from Schenectady &c.*

*It is not my desire to be grasping or over ambitious, yet I believe it to be your wish that if any business of this kind be done, it should go thru the Express so far as is consistent & proper, rather than that it should be smuggled over the rail roads & indirect violation of your orders to those in your employ.*

Livingston's strategic plan was for Corning to provide his expressmen with a dedicated space in the baggage car of passenger trains – where they might ride with their valises (instead of taking up valuable passenger space) and perform some of their accounting tasks. He introduced the idea in letter #2 of 4 September 1844: *What we most want is one end of one of those long Baggage Cars for our exclusive purposes, for which we would be willing to pay any reasonable price either for the Room or Space, or by the hundred wt for the quantity we actually ship over the Road for such exclusive Room we will at once contract for it for one year or more at a given price or by the Trip.* The prospect of payment by weight would be especially attractive to railway men in light of the mails being carried by the trip, with no foreknowledge of either weight or bulk.

Before postal reform, the expressmen had to travel as passengers to conform to the law, now they might increase profit both to themselves and the railroads if they occupied different space. Livingston returned to his previous idea in letter #16 to Corning of 4 November 1845:

*It is our intention to send two messengers daily, both east and west, instead of one. Instead of them riding in the passenger cars we wish that an apartment should be set apart for their exclusive use in the baggage cars. In some of these recently built there is an apartment at each end, one of which we now occupy for our freight, and which with certain unimportant alterations, would answer our purpose.*

*It would be necessary to make two small windows in this apartment, for the purpose of air and light; and to have in it a small stove in cold weather. Our messengers would occupy this room, and put in it as large a quantity of freight as possible, leaving but little room for themselves. By this means the room they would otherwise occupy in the passenger cars would be available for the passengers, and the freight they would carry in it would not require accommodations elsewhere. We should also want a door from this apartment into the baggage room, to be secured by our messengers at their pleasure.*

*With these additional facilities we could give ample protection to property, and at the same time not increase expense or trouble to your road.*

Though such arrangements were not made for expressmen, the consolidated railroad route that Corning had imagined (in 1853 called the New York Central) would provide the Post Office Department with a whole Railway Post Office car before his death in 1872.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Telegraph**

The telegraph was the final communications link across the western part of New York state to concern both Livingston and Corning. Livingston had invested, along with Butterfield and Wells, in the New York, Albany and Buffalo Telegraph line – the first to span the state. In letter #13 (4 August 1845) Livingston recommended that Corning retain some control over the railroad rights of way sought by the telegraph companies. He is firm in his belief that the Post Office Department would eventually purchase the telegraph, and Corning would be foolish to give away this potential profit. Corning did, indeed, freely grant the telegraph a right-of-way over his railroad land. Livingston explained that the telegraph was, for him, a side bet; he fully expected to profit when the Post Office Department would take over all telegraphs.

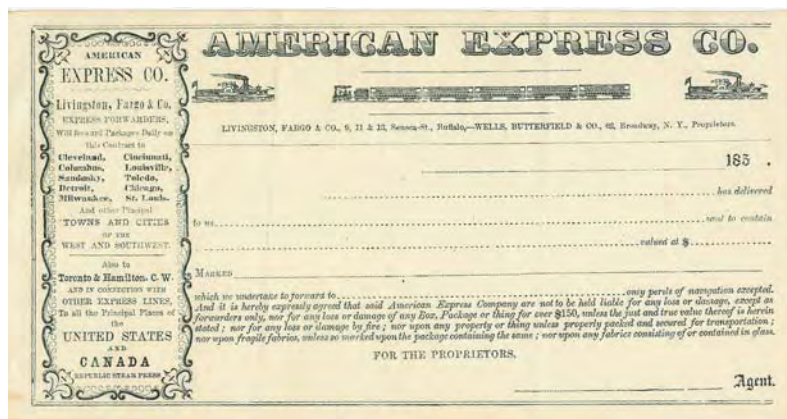
In September, Livingston would become a trustee of the New York, Albany & Buffalo Telegraph Company; in October of the New York and Boston Magnetic Telegraph Association. He and Wells would become contractors for a telegraph across the border to Canada from Buffalo, and westward to Michigan. His cousin, Robert

Cambridge Livingston, would become a shareholder in House's Printing Telegraph Company and a director of the American Telegraph Company. As an expressman, Crawford Livingston profited by carrying unmailable matter – but it was also untelegaphable, so there was no conflict of interest. In his experience, the post office consistently took on the responsibility of communication links, once they had been pioneered by private concerns. *That it is the intention of Government to purchase, after individuals have built some of the main lines, I think there cannot be a doubt.*



**Figure 7: An 1847 stock certificate for 2 shares in the New-York & Boston Telegraph, signed by Crawford Livingston as a trustee.**

Crawford Livingston died of tuberculosis in 1847 and in 1848 was replaced in Wells and Company by Johnston Livingston. The next year, a rival express company negotiated with Corning – formed by Butterfield and James Wasson, a former postmaster of Albany. The competition spurred the coalition that would become American Express under Wells as president.



**Figure 8: An unused receipt for the newly-formed American Express Co. – their New York to Buffalo route handled by Wells, Butterfield; their Buffalo westward by Livingston, Fargo.**

Livingston was wrong in his assessment that the Post Office Department would take over the telegraph – Postmaster General Johnson believed the government should operate it, but not under the POD as it would never make money.

### Conclusion

The relationship between the Express and the Post Office has often been seen through the simple lens of Cheap Postage and the issue of the monopoly on first class mail. These letters instruct us that postal reform was more complex, and the services that fell to the Express more varied. The confrontation between the Express and

the Post Office Department required a negotiation which defined an ongoing, important, role for the private entrepreneur to play in mediating relations between state and national governments; between private individuals and state corporations. Livingston's choice to seek alliance with the Post Office helped define Express altogether, and gave his express (living on as American Express and Wells, Fargo) solid footing.

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<sup>1</sup> By February 1845, Horace Greeley's *New-York Weekly Tribune* simplified the postal reform debate to "Cheap Postage" to provide a slogan for public debate.

<sup>2</sup> Andro Linklater, *Measuring America* (New York 2002), in recording the acceleration of purchase of public lands – more than 57 million acres between 1830 and 1837 (which is precisely the period served by the doubling of number of miles served by postal routes) – returns to Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 essay *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, and asserts that a distinctive American spirit **did** arise from the acquisition of landed property. (Penguin 2003 edition page 174)

<sup>3</sup> Peter Z. Grossman, *American Express: The Unofficial History of the People Who Built the Great Financial Empire*, (New York 1987) page 39. President Andrew Jackson in 1832 vetoed Congress' bill to renew the 1816 charter of the Second Bank of the United States that would expire in 1836.

<sup>4</sup> PMG Barry in his annual report of 1832 announced his dedication to facilitating "intercourse by travelling" as he was certain travelers would bring "an increase of revenue to the department more than equivalent to the increase of expenditure which they occasion." IN 1834 he repeated: "The celerity of the mail should always be equal to the most rapid transmission of the traveler." PMG Amos Kendall in his report of 1835 actually coined the term "universal traveler." Successive postmasters followed suit and extended the pairing of daily mails and the fastest mode of passenger travel to toll roads and railroads.

<sup>5</sup> A.L. Stimson in *History of the Express Business* (New York 1881) quotes a newspaper announcement of 23 February 1839 (page 34) that Harnden "For the last five years conductor and passenger-clerk for the Boston and Worcester Railroad Company, has made arrangements with the Providence Railroad and New York Steamboat Companies ... [to] take charge of all small packages of goods, bundles, &c., that may be intrusted to his care, and see them safely delivered, and attend to forwarding merchandise of all descriptions (except that proscribed by the Railroad Companies), if directed to his care ..." Harnden's New York office then advertised at No. 1 Wall Street. James W. Hale is credited with encouraging Harnden to begin his express. According to an account in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* of August 1875 (vol LI No. 303 page 315) "When Harnden called upon me for advice ... I thought of the daily inquiries made at my office, 'Do you know any body going to Boston this evening?' and I immediately advised him to travel between the two cities and do errands for the business men. I also suggested that the new enterprise should be called 'The Express,' which gave the idea of speed, promptitude, and fidelity."

<sup>6</sup> In his annual report for 1841, 1<sup>st</sup> Asst. PMG S.R. Hobbie (Sen Ex Doc 2 [26-2] 2 Dec 1841) quoted Boston postmaster Nathaniel Greene on the POD's arrangements with Harnden, pages 453-4: "By this arrangement he received the foreign letters from the merchants, put them up in parcels directed to himself in New York, brought them to the [Boston post] office and paid the postage on them; they were then mailed for New York, put in a separate bag, with a separate way bill, locked with the post office lock, and the bag confided to the hands of Harnden, to be conveyed to the New York post office. On his arrival there, the bag was immediately opened, its contents delivered to Mr. H. according to the direction, and he immediately repaired on board the packet ship with the same."

<sup>7</sup> In the same 1841 report, Hobbie argued for an extension of the scope of Harnden's contract with the POD – to carry letters for their customers as long as they paid the normal postage to the government. "Thus these 'common carriers' ... might be continued in all their usefulness as such, with the incalculable advantage of acting honestly and legally in regard to the conveyance of mailable matter, and become important auxiliaries to the Department." His recommendation was not then accepted but would be later for the western expresses.

<sup>8</sup> Stimson 1881, op cit, page 43.

<sup>9</sup> These letters, owned by the authors, fall naturally among a sequence of correspondence housed in the Corning papers, Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany NY

<sup>10</sup> These addresses appear on his correspondence. His printed letterhead leaves the number on Wall Street blank – as the family were expanding along the street, which had become the home of the express business in the city. John Doggett's *New-York City Directory for 1844 & 1845* lists Livingston, Wells & Pomeroy's express at number 2 Wall Street (other offices in Albany, Troy, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago & Canada), as well as Crawford Livingston himself (whose home was at 57 Greenwich), Henry Wells (whose home was in Buffalo) and Thaddeus Pomeroy, George's brother (whose home was in Albany). Cambridge Livingston, a cousin, is listed as a lawyer at number 7 Wall and Charles L. Livingston, a lawyer, at 4 Wall. Number 2 Wall was shared with Pullen & Co. (Troy & Northern Express). Number 7 Wall Street, in addition to housing a Livingston lawyer, was home to several express companies: Adams & Co. (with offices otherwise in Boston, Worcester, Norwich, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Pittsburg & Foreign), Benjamin Beecher Jr. (New Haven & Hartford), Gorton's (Stonington, Providence, Newport & Fall River), Mathews (Albany, Utica, Syracuse & Oswego,

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Kingston & Toronto in Canada). Harnden has moved to number 4 Wall (other offices in Boston, Providence, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Pittsburg & Foreign).

<sup>11</sup> Sylvie R. Griffiths, “Johnston Livingston, The Express Business, and the Californian Connection” in *The Livingston Legacy: Three Centuries of American History*, ed. Richard T. Wiles, Bard College Center 1987. Griffiths makes the point that the Livingston family actually preferred that their name not be on the express company in the west – as the whole trade became less genteel.

<sup>12</sup> In his report for 1839 (quoted in *History of the Railway Mail Service*, S Ex. Doc. 40 (48-2) 1885, page 40), PMG Kendall argued against the railroad myopia: “All railroads in connection with each other will ultimately find their profit in considering themselves parts of one system, in submitting to the inconveniences of their respective positions, and in so arranging their hours of running as to make connected traveling lines, and not impose on travelers the necessity of stopping at intermediate points in their journey. And it is this close connection, most favorable to railroads in reference to travel, which the Department requires for the transmission of the mails.” Certainly, Corning agreed.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Wells, in an 1863 paper for The Buffalo Historical Society, reprinted in 1938 as *The American Express in its Relation to Buffalo*, gave this encomium: “Let me bear a most willing testimony here to the encouragement that the Express received from that man of large thought, and large act – Erastus Corning. He was its friend, when it needed that friendship which is the strong hand at the right time.” The right time was here, in 1844.

<sup>14</sup> Stimson’s earlier work, *History of the Express Companies: and the origin of American Railroads* (New York 1858) and his later of 1881 record the journey of the Albany and Buffalo express this way: “Its transportation at that time, (1841,) was by Railroad to Auburn; thence by stage, 25 miles, to Geneva; thence by Auburn and Rochester R.R. to Rochester; thence to Lockport, 60 miles, by stage; thence to Buffalo, 30 miles, by private conveyance; and also from Rochester to Batavia, 34 miles, by Tonawanda R.R.; and thence to Buffalo, 40 miles, by stage. The trip was made once a week, and occupied four nights and three days. It is now accomplished in about eleven hours each way.” Alvin F. Harlow paraphrases this in *Old Waybills* (NY 1934) page 34. By 1842, there was a continuous series of rails from Albany to Buffalo, but it involved 7 different railroads and a passenger had to change trains 6 times. Harlow *The Road of the Century* (NY 1947).

<sup>15</sup> Both Stimson and Wells record this lineage for Livingston, Wells & Pomeroy.

<sup>16</sup> A railroad was built from New York City to a point opposite Albany by 1851 (though there was no bridge across the Hudson River there until 1866). Until then, passengers including expressmen, and freight, were often carried by the day or night line steamships with a stop at Tivoli – near Livingston Manor. The railroad, too, stopped at Tivoli. See Griffiths, op cit. Except for the carriage of mail, the interruption of river navigation in winter was not particularly troublesome – emigrants chose different seasons – so the development of railroads lagged, a line on the west side of the Hudson not being completed until the 1880s.

<sup>17</sup> Harnden, the two men probably knew, had been deathly ill for months with tuberculosis, and would die 4 January 1845.

<sup>18</sup> Harnden had pioneered the international express link with his English and Continental Express, begun 1841, with offices in Liverpool, London and Paris, and so was in place to handle foreign mail forwarding. *Harper’s* op cit.

<sup>19</sup> “An Act to provide for the transportation of the mail between the United States and foreign countries, and for other purposes” approved 3 March 1845 (*Laws and Regulations for the government of the Post Office Department with an appendix*. Washington 1847, pages 55-57). Section 4 prohibited any person on board a ship transporting U.S. mail to carry any letter, packet, newspaper, or printed circular or price current – except for reading copies of newspapers not intended to circulate in the foreign country.

<sup>20</sup> Siegel Auction Galleries, 2007 Rarities Sale, lot 315, a letter carried from New York City to Cleveland, July 20, 1844. “This is the first east-to-west Pomeroy/Wells usage we have seen.” “Pomeroy’s Mail” (though not one of his adhesive stamps) carried it to Buffalo; “[Wells] Letter Express” from Buffalo to Cleveland. Wells, though, did join Livingston in eschewing any letter express from Albany to Buffalo. *Old Waybills*, op cit, page 45.

<sup>21</sup> HR Doc 105 (28-2) Feb 5, 1845. C. A. Wickliffe’s letter transmitting a statement on railroad and steamboat lines employed to carry mails. Page 1: “The increase of mail business and postage expected from the advancing growth of the country and the spread of population, is more than counteracted by the operations of private expresses and other facilities for conveying letters out of the mail. Yet these facilities do not satisfy or prevent the continual demand of the public for more mail routes in the newly settling portions of the United States, nor avert the necessity of employing the new railroad, steamboat and coach lines, which are from time to time coming into operation in the older sections of the country.” Also: HR Doc 162 (28-2) Mar 3, 1845. C.A. Wickliffe’s letter relative to the amount of postage received at the principal post offices upon mail routes upon which private expresses have been established ...” with a table, page 3, showing that postages had dramatically declined between New York City and Utica, though not at Buffalo.

<sup>22</sup> In the 1858 second edition of A.L. Stimson’s *History of the Express Companies*, there is a mention of Lewis Eaton as a Special Agent of the U.S. Mail Department who contacted Pomeroy & Co. in 1842 or 1843 to handle the government’s express business (page 146). This was corrected, however, in Stimson’s 1881 reworking of the material [op cit] and Eaton’s name is dropped from this anecdote (page 61). It is possible that Stimson was remembering Eaton as a Special Agent – but mistook the years of his employment. The recounting of a short-lived government opposition express line to Buffalo (attempted under the leadership of Enoch J. Humphrey) was also pruned back to Pomeroy’s declining the offer.

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<sup>23</sup> Hobbie was Andrew Jackson's First Assistant Postmaster General, beginning in 1829, who continued in that role until 1854, except for a hiatus during the administration of Millard Fillmore. He was the architect of the postal system, overseeing all mail contracts.

<sup>24</sup> "An Act to reduce the rates of postage, to limit the use and correct the abuse of the franking privilege, and for the prevention of frauds on the revenues of the Post Office Department." Approved 3 March 1845. (1847 Laws op cit, pages 58-69.)

<sup>25</sup> An interesting tongue-in-cheek letter appeared in the *New York Weekly Tribune*, Mar 1, 1845, page 6 col 5: under "Cheap Postage Bill." "While the merchants are looking with anxiety for a change so important to their interests, and the people at large, including those few who write no letters, are demanding it as a matter of justice, we look on it with interest in a literary regard. Will twice as many, or ten times as many letters be written, when correspondence is a less expensive pleasure than at present? Here then is another tax on the intellects of our devoted people; already they, almost all, write for the press; now, beside, they are to carry on this immense correspondence. The empire which our people seem determined to grasp, from sea to sea, is to be pierced with canals and railroads, till there is scarcely a green nook or shady lane left for the retirement of lovers and poets: newspapers are to flutter into the lowliest huts with every breeze ... the Magnetic Telegraph is to bind pole with pole in lively intercourse of gossip and repartee; the collision of character from every region will demand a mercurial temperature to melt the various elements into one mass, in short, a life as intense, a communication more rapid, than pervaded the little State of Attica in its days of glory, is to be established in this vast country. ... And now, in addition to all the other demands upon our energies, comes this inducement to write many and long letters. Yet there is one good thing about it: this private literature is likely to be more sincere, more characteristic, than that which is designed for the public. When books are to be placarded in letters two inches long, so that the ardent runner cannot help reading their titles, if no more, letters where there is more of family sacredness, genuine affinity and untarnished sentiment may be a useful countercheck. ..."

<sup>26</sup> Sir Rowland & George Birkbeck Hill, *The Life of Sir Rowland Hill and the History of Penny Postage*, London 1880, page 86.

<sup>27</sup> A "Prospectus for the Enlarged District School Journal" printed in Albany in April of 1844, and enclosed in a letter mailed 10 October 1844 en route to Boston, showed that editors were planning in advance of the new law to enlarge their publications. This journal was going to be 50% larger, to afford New York state's 11,000 school districts "much more space for communications from county and town officers in relation to local movements of interest." At 50 cents, publisher Francis Dwight claimed the journal was "the cheapest publication issued" – possible because postage would be free.

<sup>28</sup> 1847 Law op cit, page 67. In Section 17, this is by implication only. "all pecuniary penalties and forfeitures, incurred under this act, shall be one half for the use of the person or persons informing and prosecuting for the same, and the other half to the use of the United States, and shall be paid over to the Postmaster General..."

<sup>29</sup> *New-York Weekly Tribune*, Mar. 8, 1845, page 4 col 5, under "Postage Reform – Secured" reported that: "The vote was almost exactly a sectional one – the Free States for the Reduction, the Slave States against it."

<sup>30</sup> Corning eventually did sign the new contract, and received in compensation for the 78 miles of the Utica and Schenectady, \$11,700 a year. Since he ran a train twice each day, this worked out to \$100 per mile for the first run and \$50 for the second.

<sup>31</sup> The canals were usually closed from the end of November to mid April. A.J. Weise, *History of The City of Troy*, Troy 1876, page 367 "Opening and Closing of the Canals from 1824 to 1875" shows that the canals closed November 26 in 1844, reopening on April 15, 1845.

<sup>32</sup> Stimson in his 1858 edition (page 144) points out that, to justify a daily express in 1843, Wells persuaded fishermen along the Albany to Buffalo line that shad, oysters &c were desirable express freight.

<sup>33</sup> Railway Post Offices were established between Albany and Buffalo on the New York Central Rail Road beginning in 1868 (Leo A. McKee and Alfred L. Lewis, *Railroad Post Office History*, 1972) and in 1875 a dedicated fast mail train was inaugurated from New York City to Chicago, over the rails of The New York Central and the Pennsylvania (William J. Dennis, *The Traveling Post Office*, 1916).