

18th CONGRESS.]

No. 54.

[2d SESSION.

CONDITION OF THE POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT.

COMMUNICATED TO CONGRESS, BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, DECEMBER 7, 1824.

SIR:

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT, *November 30, 1824.*

I have the honor to submit to you the following report respecting the transactions of this Department:

The expenditures of the Department, from the 1st April, 1822, to the 1st April, 1823, were, as stated in my report of November last, - - - - - \$1,169,885 51
 The receipts for postage, during the same period, were - - - - - 1,114,345 12
 Leaving an expenditure of fifty-five thousand five hundred and forty dollars and thirty-nine cents more than the current receipts: - - - - - \$55,540 39

The expenditures from the 1st April, 1823, to the 1st April, 1824, were - - - - - \$1,170,144 63
 Receipts for postage, during the same time, amounted to - - - - - 1,153,845 72
 Leaving an expenditure, beyond the receipts, of sixteen thousand two hundred and ninety-eight dollars and ninety-one cents: - - - - - \$16,298 91

A comparison of the receipts for postage for the three quarters preceding the 30th June last, with the corresponding quarters of the previous year, will show a considerable increase of receipts.

Postage received from 1st October to 31st December, 1823, amounted to - - - - - \$277,833 10
 In the corresponding quarter of 1822 there was received - - - - - 261,741 64

Making an increase, for this quarter, of sixteen thousand and ninety-one dollars and forty-six cents: \$16,091 46

Postage received from 1st January, 1824, to the 31st of March ensuing, - - - - - \$309,755 69
 Postage received in the corresponding quarter of the year 1823, - - - - - 286,144 29

Making an increase, for this quarter, of twenty-three thousand six hundred and eleven dollars and forty cents: \$23,611 40

Postage received from the 1st April to the 30th June, 1824, - - - - - \$291,275 54
 There was received, for the corresponding quarter of the year 1823, - - - - - 288,211 26

Making an increase, for this quarter, of three thousand and sixty-four dollars and twenty-eight cents: \$3,064 28

The total increase of receipts for the three quarters specified is \$42,767 14.

The accounts rendered for the quarter ending on the 30th of September last have not been all examined, but it is calculated that the receipts will exceed, by fifteen thousand dollars, the receipts of the corresponding quarter of the previous year, which will make an augmentation of receipts, for the four quarters, of about fifty-seven thousand seven hundred and sixty-seven dollars.

The total amount of receipts for postage, for the three quarters above stated, is - - - - - \$878,866 33
 During the same time, the expenditures of the Department were - - - - - 868,121 50

Leaving the sum of ten thousand seven hundred and forty-four dollars and eighty-three cents more than the expenditures for the three quarters: - - - - - \$10,744 83

Contracts were made in September, 1823, to transport the mail, in the present year, two hundred and thirty-five thousand three hundred and seventy-eight miles more than it was transported in the year 1823. One hundred and twenty-five thousand and thirty-four miles of this distance it will be conveyed in stages. There has also been given on many routes, within the same time, greater expedition to the conveyance of the mail, for which an adequate compensation is paid.

In making the mail contracts, in September last, for New England and New York, there was but little reduction of expenditure, but many important accommodations were given, by making provision for an increased transportation of the mail. Under these contracts the mail will be conveyed two hundred and fifty-nine thousand seven hundred and forty miles, per annum, more than it has ever before been transported by contract in the same sections of country. It will be conveyed in stages the whole of this distance, except ten thousand five hundred and four miles.

Since the 1st of July, 1823, the transportation of the mail has been increased four hundred and ninety-five thousand one hundred and eighteen miles per annum. Of this distance it will be conveyed in stages three hundred and seventy-four thousand two hundred and seventy miles.

This transportation, computed at the lowest price for which similar service is performed, will amount to the sum of thirty thousand dollars annually. When to this sum is added the deficiency of receipts to meet the expenditures for the year ending on the 1st April, 1823, and the probable excess of receipts, for the present year, above the expenditures, the improvement of the operations of the Department will appear.

For the above service, - - - - - \$30,000 00
 Deficiency of receipts to meet the expenditures for the year ending on the 1st April, 1823, - - - - - 55,540 39
 Probable amount of receipts for postage the present year, above the current expenses, - - - - - 15,000 00

\$100,540 39

From this statement it appears that the condition of the Department has been improved, in comparison with the year ending on the 1st of April, 1823, by a reduction of expenditure and increase of receipts, one hundred thousand five hundred and forty dollars and thirty-nine cents per annum.

The advantages from the arrangement adopted respecting newspaper postage have not been fully developed, but it has been ascertained that the receipts from that item have been increased at the rate of about twenty-five thousand dollars per annum.

Unremitting exertions have been made to collect the balances due to the Department. Within the past year many suits have been brought, and judgments obtained. In many cases, where judgments have been obtained on

accounts of long standing, the delinquent Postmasters, and their sureties, have been found insolvent, and the costs of suit have been consequently paid by the Department. To avoid, as far as possible, a useless expenditure of this kind, the attorney of the United States is now requested, when an account of some years' standing is sent to him for collection, not to commence suit, if, on inquiry, he shall find that the principal and his surety are insolvent. To issue process in such a case would subject the Department to a bill of costs, without answering any valuable object to the public. In a short time all demands against delinquent Postmasters will be in suit, where there exists any probability that more than the costs can be collected.

The improvement which has been made in the revenue of this Department, for the past year, authorizes the opinion that it will be able to meet an increased expenditure, by affording additional mail accommodations on established routes, or by transporting the mail on new routes which Congress may think proper to establish.

There are many routes, now in operation, which require a greater expenditure than any advantage arising to the public would seem to justify. If these were discontinued, and other routes of more general utility established, the public convenience would be greatly promoted, without adding to the expenditure of the Department. A judicious revision of the mail routes, and of the law regulating the Post Office Department, will enable it, in a very short time, not only to send the mail into every populous neighborhood of the Union, but to give every accommodation which may be desirable to the important commercial points.

The money lately appropriated by Congress to repair so much of the mail route, from Nashville, in Tennessee, to New Orleans, as passes through the Indian country, and which was placed, by your direction, at the disposition of this Department, has been applied to the object intended, except five hundred and ninety dollars and six cents.

As a small sum of money was to be expended in repairing a road of great length, and as the public interest required that the repairs should be made the whole extent, so as to remove all obstructions to the transportation of the mail, it was deemed important, before the commencement of the work, to ascertain the nature and extent of those obstructions. This was done by the person appointed to make the repairs; and, in making them, streams of water, which were occasionally rendered impassable to the mail, by high water, were bridged; and swamps, which were also sometimes impassable, were causewayed. The work, it is believed, has been faithfully executed, and at such places on the route as most required it.

After the work was done the money was paid, on the valuation of two practical men who were recommended to the Department as well qualified for that purpose. They were instructed to examine minutely the manner in which the work had been performed, with a view to its permanency and the object designed, and to report what sum would be a reasonable compensation for it.

The balance of the appropriation, which remains unexpended, will be applied in making some additional repairs during the present winter.

I have the honor to be, most respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOHN McLEAN.

The PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

18th CONGRESS.]

No. '55.

[2d SESSION.

POST ROUTE FROM NEW ORLEANS TO WASHINGTON.

COMMUNICATED TO THE SENATE, DECEMBER 15, 1824.

SIR:

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT, *December 15, 1824.*

In obedience to a resolution of the Senate of the United States, adopted at their last session, requiring the Postmaster General to report to the "Senate, at the present session, the most practicable post route from New Orleans to Washington City," I have the honor to state, that the route on which the mail has been transported, for several years past, from this city to New Orleans, is by the way of Fredericksburg and Abingdon, in Virginia; Knoxville and McMinnville, in Tennessee; Huntsville, Rushville, and Pikeville, in Alabama; Columbus, Jackson, Fort Gibson, Washington, Natchez, and Woodville, in Mississippi; thence, by St. Francisville and Baton Rouge, to New Orleans. This route is estimated to be 1,380 miles, and requires a travel of twenty-four days.

The military road, as it is called, from Columbus, in Mississippi, to Madisonville, in Louisiana, is on nearly a direct line from the former to New Orleans, and much nearer than the road by the way of Washington and Natchez. But this road is represented to be so much out of repair as to render the regular transportation of the mail upon it impracticable. The bridges and causeways have fallen into decay; and, in many parts, the entire space, opened for the road, has become filled with young growths of timber.

Some years since, a contract was made by this Department to transport the mail to New Orleans from this city, by Salisbury, in North Carolina, Spartanburg, in South Carolina, Athens and Fort Hawkins, in Georgia, and Fort Stoddart, in Alabama; the distance being computed at 1,260 miles. But there were so many obstructions on this route, arising from streams of water and other causes, that it was found impracticable to perform the contract, and it was abandoned.

There is a mail route from Knoxville, in Tennessee, by the way of Kingston, in the same State, Bennettville, Cahawba, and St. Stephen's, in Alabama, to New Orleans; which makes the distance from Washington to that place 1,222 miles. But the obstructions on this route are known to be nearly as great as on the route by the way of Athens and Fort Hawkins.

The post route to New Orleans, which passes through the capitals of the Southern States, is estimated at 1,312 miles. This distance might be reduced to 1,100 miles, if no greater deviations from a direct line were made than would be necessary to obtain good ground for a road, and to pass through Richmond, Raleigh, Columbia, and Millidgeville, and thence by Coweta and St. Stephen's, to New Orleans. A part of the Alabama and Mississippi mail, and the mail from the South to New Orleans, are transported on this route. But, in the winter and spring seasons of the year, the numerous streams of water, over which there are neither bridges nor ferries, present insurmountable obstacles to the regular and rapid transmission of the mail on this route.

On a direct line from Washington to New Orleans the distance is 960 miles. This line passes near Warrenton, Charlottesville, Lexington, Big Lick, Grayson court-house, in Virginia, Ashville, in North Carolina; thence, through the Indian country by Cahawba and St. Stephen's, in Alabama, to Pearlton, near Lake Borgne; thence to New Orleans.

The northwestern part of North Carolina, through which this line passes, is so mountainous as to render a deviation to the south or north, in constructing a road, indispensable. A deviation to the north, so as to avoid the mountains, will pass by or near Fotheringay, Wythe court-house, Christiansburg, and Abingdon, in Virginia, Knoxville, in Tennessee; thence, through the Tennessee valley, by Cahawba, to New Orleans, on nearly a straight direction.