

# PONY EXPRESS.

---

## NINE DAYS FROM SAN FRANCISCO To New York.

---

**THE CENTRAL OVERLAND PONY EXPRESS CO.** will start their **LETTER EXPRESS** from San Francisco to New York and intermediate points, **On Tuesday, the 3d day of April next,** And upon every **TUESDAY** thereafter, at 4 o'clock, P. M. Letters will be received at San Francisco until 3¼ o'clock, P. M., each day of departure.

**OFFICE—Alta Telegraph Office, Montgomery street**

Telegraphic Dispatches will be received at Carson City until 6 o'clock, P. M., every Wednesday.

Schedule Time from San Francisco to New York :

For Telegraphic Dispatches, 9 days;

For Letters, 13 days.

Letters will be charged between San Francisco and Salt Lake City, \$3 per half ounce and under, and at that rate according to weight. To all points **BEYOND** Salt Lake City, \$5 per half ounce and under, and that rate according to weight.

Telegraphic Dispatches will be subject to the same charges as Letters.

All Letters must be enclosed in stamped Envelopes.

**WM. W. FINNEY,**

mh17-tf     **Agent Central Overland Pony Express Co.**  
Times copy.

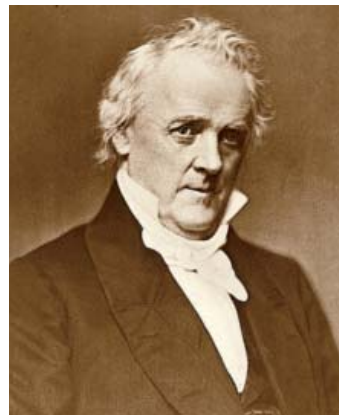
# THE ALYESKA COLLECTION OF PONY EXPRESS MAIL

## The Path Between One Era and Another

THE PONY EXPRESS, WHICH RAN FROM APRIL 1860 TO OCTOBER 1861, followed the physical manifestation of white Americans' destiny and crossed the boundary between the antebellum era and the Civil War.

The Pony Express route followed the well-established Oregon-California Trail—really a string of ox-cart trails with alternate routes—which crossed the Great Plains, the Great Basin and the mountains and valleys of Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Nevada and California. Much of the Pony Express route—especially the 1,350 miles between Fort Kearny and Carson City—traversed the American Indians' homeland, where various tribes and bands hunted buffalo, harvested pine nuts, camped near water sources and raised their families.

The vast territory acquired by the United States as a result of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican War, and the discovery of gold and silver in California, Colorado and present-day Nevada, fueled the migration of pioneer settlers to the West. By 1860 the encroachment on Indian civilization was nearly complete.



President James Buchanan



President Abraham Lincoln

When the Pony Express started in April 1860, the slavery question was tearing the country apart. As the election of 1860 approached, the Republican party's candidate, Abraham Lincoln, campaigned against the pro-slavery candidates while debates raged over extending slavery into the newly-settled lands west of the Mississippi River.

At this point, communication between the coasts still required the physical transport of mail, either by ocean or land. Letters sent by steamship and rail across the Isthmus of Panama took at least three weeks to reach their destination. The alternative land routes were no faster and far less reliable.

The Pony Express promised to carry a letter or telegram between California and Missouri in just 10 days. For businesses dependent on timely news and a public engaged in the hot political issues of 1860, the ability to send and receive messages in half the customary time was essential. For the three men who launched it, the Pony Express was a means to an end—a public relations tool to win congressional support for a lucrative mail contract along the Central Route.

Unprofitable from the start, plagued by troubles and doomed by the transcontinental telegraph, the Pony Express still managed to move between 35,000 and 40,000 letters a total distance of more than 600,000 miles during its nineteen months of existence [1].

***Russell, Majors and Waddell, and The Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Co.***

The migration to California and other regions west of Missouri created a tremendous need for transportation services to carry supplies, mail and newspapers. This demand was met by steamship companies and overland stage companies.

The water-based operators travelled the Pacific Ocean between California and the Isthmus of Panama, where a land-crossing was made to connecting steamers on the other side, plying the Atlantic waters. Land-based operators using horse-drawn stagecoaches and ox-driven wagon trains had two basic options. They could take the Southern Route via Los Angeles, Fort Yuma, El Paso and Fort Smith (Memphis and St. Louis were the two eastern terminals), or they could follow the Central Route across the Rocky Mountains (San Francisco and St. Joseph/Leavenworth at opposite ends). The Central Route offered a more direct path, but the Southern Route was more reliable, because it avoided treacherous mountain terrain and weather.

By 1859 the U.S. Post Office Department had contracts with three firms to provide mail transport across the Southern Route (Overland Mail Co.) and the Central Route (Hockaday from St. Joseph to Salt Lake City, and Chorpensing from Salt Lake City to Placerville). The contract for semi-weekly mails on the Southern Route paid \$600,000 per year. The less-reliable Central Route paid only \$205,000 per year, because postal officials reduced the number of trips to two per month [2].

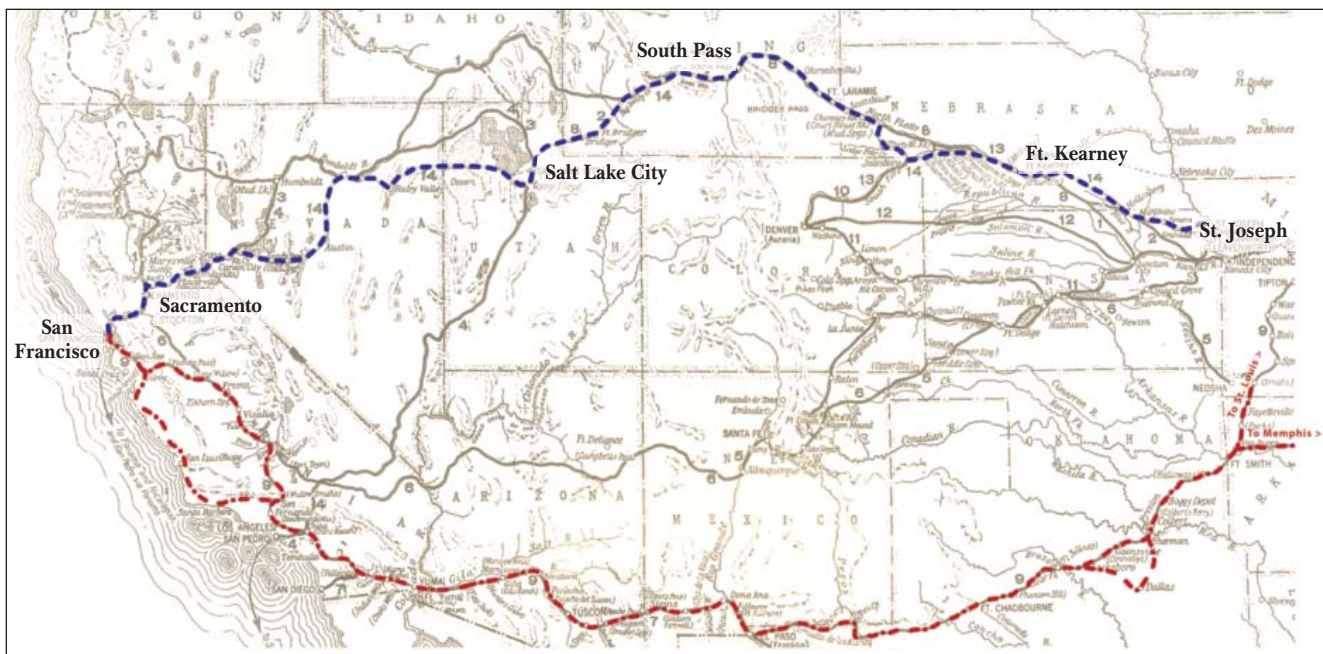
William H. Russell, Alexander Majors and William B. Waddell originally joined forces in December 1854, in order to win the War Department contract for transporting supplies to western military outposts. The Quartermaster General had recently switched from an ad hoc contracting policy to awarding two-year contracts, which made supplying outposts more dependable for the government and more profitable for the contractors.

Russell was a promoter and lobbyist who spent much of his time trying to secure government contracts. Majors was a skilled operations manager, responsible for organizing and maintaining the caravans that carried enormous quantities of freight. Waddell was the quiet and conservative financial man. Russell, Majors and Waddell built a successful freighting business. However, in 1857 they began to spiral downward after Mormons destroyed a large supply train under contract with the War Department.



William H. Russell, Alexander Majors, William B. Waddell—the three principal directors of the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company, which created the Pony Express in 1860.





Map of the overland stage route in 1860

--- Central Route  
 - - - Southern Route

The loss incurred during the Mormon War left Russell, Majors and Waddell in debt, and the government was unwilling to compensate them for \$500,000 in claims. Faced with this gloomy financial picture, Russell turned his attention to obtaining a government contract to carry mail along the Central Route. The idea of a faster, more direct route from St. Joseph to San Francisco had its proponents, but skeptics argued that the route could never function when winter weather made the mountain trails unpassable.

In 1858 Russell and John S. Jones, along with several other partners, started a stage and express operation called the Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Express Company. L&PP acquired the bankrupted Hockaday line in May 1859 and invested heavily in reorganizing the stage route between St. Joseph and Salt Lake City. The burden of debt soon became too great for Russell and his partners. In October 1859 the assets and liabilities of L&PP were assumed by a new partnership between Russell, Majors and Waddell. For Majors and Waddell, the assumption of their partner's debt must have been a bitter pill, because they had cautioned him not to over-estimate the revenue that could be generated by the L&PP stage line.

On November 19, 1859, Russell named the new firm The Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company (COC&PP), betting on his ability to secure a mail contract for the entire Central Route. Apparently Russell failed to consult his partners about naming the company. He also sidestepped Majors and Waddell when he decided to "establish a Pony Express to Sacramento, California, commencing 3rd of April. Time ten days." [3]

The concept of a rapid express using relay riders over the Central Route is credited to Benjamin F. Ficklin, an experienced stage line manager. It is reported that Ficklin gave the idea to Senator William M. Gwin during a horseback trip along the route in



U.S. Senator William M. Gwin was a pro-slavery Democrat who served as U.S. senator from California from 1850 to 1855 and again from 1857 to 1861. He is credited with encouraging William H. Russell to launch the Pony Express, an idea given to him by Benjamin F. Ficklin.

1854. Gwin introduced legislation in January 1855 to establish “a weekly letter express [along the Central Route],” but the bill never made it out of committee. Ficklin later served as superintendent of the L&PP Express. Late in 1859, Senator Gwin approached Russell about establishing a Pony Express to help promote the viability of the Central Route. Russell, seeing this as a strategy to winning the mail contract, embraced the Pony Express and persuaded his reluctant partners to support the enterprise. [4]

Russell announced his intention to establish the Pony Express on January 27, 1860. With only two months to prepare for the April 3rd launch date, Russell, Majors and Waddell had to choose the exact route, locate and build stations, hire employees, buy horses and supplies, and advertise the schedule and rates for Pony Express mail. Their success was due to the experience and abilities of Majors, Ficklin and the superintendents, and to the fact that COC&PP already had a significant amount of infrastructure in place over much of the route.



Sacramento in 1849—steamers, barges and seagoing sailing ships crowd the Sacramento waterfront at the foot of J Street during the height of the Gold Rush.

From *The United States Illustrated* by Charles A. Dana, published in 1855



### ***The Pony Express Route and Organization***

The Pony Express route followed the old Oregon-California Trail for much of the way between the eastern terminus at St. Joseph, Missouri, and the western terminus at Sacramento, California, where the actual Pony ride would begin and end. The total distance travelled along this route was approximately 1,840 miles, passing through what are now the states of Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and Nevada. The trip between San Francisco and Sacramento, usually by steamer, added 120 to 140 miles.

Although Russell, Majors and Waddell used Leavenworth, Kansas, as their eastern stage terminus, they decided to establish the Pony Express terminus at St. Joseph, in order to connect with the Hannibal & St. Joseph Railroad (used to transport mail) and the telegraph line. St. Joseph also provided incentives, such as office space, free railroad passes for employees and free passage on the Missouri River ferry for Pony riders. [5]

The Alta Telegraph Company office in San Francisco served as the primary mail collection and delivery point. Mail was carried by steamer to and from Sacramento, where the Pony relay started and ended (the western terminus was later moved to Folsom, then Placerville).

The route was divided into five divisions, each under the management of a superintendent who reported to the general manager, Benjamin F. Ficklin. The divisions and superintendents are listed in the “Pony Express Divisions” table above.

During the two months prior to April 1860, Ficklin’s team sent out wagon trains with materials necessary to build the stations required between St. Joseph and Sacramento. Between St. Joseph and Salt Lake City, the old L&PP Express stations were augmented

#### **PONY EXPRESS DIVISIONS**

##### **Division I**

St. Joseph to Fort Kearney (340 miles)  
*Superintendent: A. E. Lewis*

##### **Division II**

Fort Kearney to Horse Shoe Sta. (363 miles)  
*Superintendent: Joseph A. Slade*

##### **Division III**

Horse Shoe Sta. to Salt Lake City (462 miles)  
*Superintendent: James E. Bromley*

##### **Division IV**

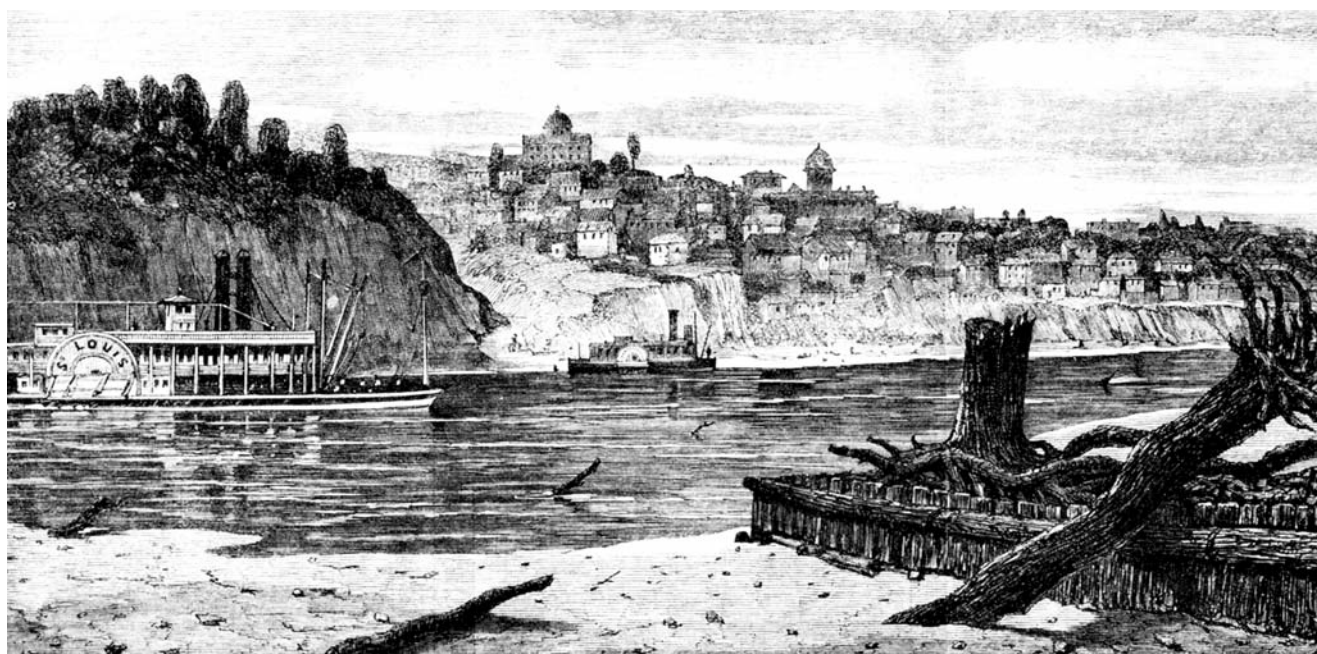
Salt Lake City to Robert’s Creek (304 miles)  
*Superintendent: Howard Egan*

##### **Division V**

Robert’s Creek to Sacramento (373 miles)  
*Superintendent: Bolivar Roberts*



Pony Express stable at St. Joseph—the original building, known as the Pike’s Peak Stable, was built in 1858 to accommodate horses used by the local freight and stagecoach company. In 1860, the Central Overland California and Pike’s Peak Express Company purchased the building for the Pony Express, to serve the same purpose. The original wooden structure was replaced by a brick building in 1888, but some of the original posts and beams were reused. In 1950, the Goetz Foundation restored the building to its 1888 brick appearance and established a museum dedicated to the Pony Express.



St. Joseph, Missouri, in 1861, viewed from the Kansas side of the Missouri River.  
The Pony Express riders crossed the Missouri between St. Joseph and Elwood, Kansas.

with new stations, spaced apart at a distance of approximately 10 to 12 miles. The route between Salt Lake City and Sacramento presented greater difficulty, because COC&PP had to build and equip many more stations. Prior to May 1860, the mail contract for this western section of the route was still held by George Chorpenning. This meant that COC&PP did not have existing infrastructure equivalent to what was in place east of the Rockies.

It is not definitely known how many stations were up and running when the Pony Express started in April 1860. One source reports 119 stations, with a home station every 75 to 100 miles apart where a rider could rest before making the return trip. Another source reports 153 stations and relay posts operating from the start. [6] The total number of stations claimed to have been used is nearly 190. [7]

The managers had to buy horses—400 to 500, according to Alexander Majors—and distribute them along the route. They also had to hire employees to man the stations and riders. The estimated number of Pony riders hired ranges from 50 to 80. [8]

The Alta Telegraph Co. was the location of the first Pony Express office in San Francisco. The address is shown on this ca. 1860 printed telegraph envelope. 153 Montgomery Street is the old street number (it is now in the 600 block).



The Pony Express was designed to operate on a relay system in which a rider would change horses every 10 to 15 miles, and a new rider would carry the *mochilla*—the leather bag used to carry mail—every 75 miles. The first published schedule projected a 240-hour journey [9]. The miles a rider and horse could run per hour varied greatly, depending on the terrain and weather conditions. On open plains, a rider could cover a much greater distance in an hour. Confronted with steep inclines and winding mountain trails, the pace slowed considerably. Relay stations where riders changed horses and passed the mochilla were established at locations best suited to the circumstances.

Only the most vivid imagination can envision the hostile environment, desolation and physical discomfort that confronted a Pony rider. A detailed and brilliantly articulated description of the land and conditions is provided in Joseph J. DiCerto's *The Saga of The Pony Express* (chapters 8 to 11). A recap of the journey follows.

The westward trip from St. Joseph first took a Pony rider across the vast prairie of the Great Plains, at a time when 30 million American bison and 50 to 100 million pronghorns still roamed the wilderness. About 100 miles west of St. Joseph, he reached the Big Blue River at Marysville. From there he followed the Little Blue River and then the Platte River to Fort Kearney. Where the river divides into north and south branches, the rider followed the South Platte for about 100 miles, venturing into Colorado Territory and stopping at Julesburg before turning back to Nebraska toward Fort Laramie.

Beyond Fort Laramie the rider entered Wyoming Territory and encountered mountainous terrain. After passing Devil's Gate, he reached South Pass, where so many pioneers had travelled before him, and then Fort Bridger. The trail followed canyons surrounded by massive snow-peaked mountains until it finally reached Salt Lake City, nestled in the valley of the Great Salt Lake.

### The Mochilla

The following description of the saddle bag used to carry Pony Express mail appears in *The White Indian Boy*, a book of stories told by a Pony Express rider named "Uncle Nick" Wilson:

Our saddles, which were all provided by the company, had nothing to them but the bare tree, stirrups, and cinch. Two large pieces of leather about sixteen inches wide by twenty-four long were laced together with a strong leather string thrown over the saddle. Fastened to these were four pockets, two in front and two behind; these hung on each side of the saddle. The two hind ones were the largest. The one in front on the left side was called the 'way pocket.' All of these pockets were locked with small padlocks and each home station keeper had a key to the 'way pocket.' When the express arrived at the home station, the keeper would unlock the 'way pocket' and if there were any letters for the boys between the home stations, the rider would distribute them as he went along. There was also a card in the way pocket that the station keeper would take out and write on it the time the express arrived and left his station. If the express was behind time, he would tell the rider how much time he had to make up.



The exterior view of the walls at Fort Bridger in 1859.



Locomotive crossing at Folsom—the rail cars of the Sacramento Valley Railroad were used to carry Pony Express mail between Sacramento and the western railroad terminal at Folsom.



With the winding paths and steep grades of the Rockies behind him, the Pony rider emerged to confront a vast and inhospitable desert. This stretch of arid land crossed from Utah to Nevada (as they exist today). It was here where the threat of Indian attacks was greatest, earning it the nickname “Paiute Hell.” Only the Ruby and Diamond Mountains interrupted the bleak desert landscape.

Once at Carson City, the rider’s final challenge was passing over the Sierra Nevada mountains. Even in favorable conditions, it took at least a day to ride the 100-mile trail to Placerville. In late June 1860 the western terminus was moved east from Sacramento to Folsom, where the Sacramento Valley Railroad reached and mail was put on cars to and from Sacramento. Placerville became the Pony terminus on July 1, 1861.

Throughout the 1,840-mile journey, dangerously unpredictable rivers and rocky terrain put both horse and horseman at risk of injury or death. Sand and snow storms could stop a rider in his tracks. Thick swarms of gnats and mosquitos were torturous. In areas still populated by Indians, to whom the western migration of pioneers represented encroachment and depletion of resources, there was always the danger of attack. In these aspects, the legend and reality of the Pony Express match.



Palmer & Day’s assay office at Folsom was the agency for the Pony Express after June 1860. It is shown in this photo with the Wells Fargo & Co. name.

This photograph shows the main street in Placerville in July 1859. Newspaper reporter Horace Greeley and the famous stage “whip” Hank Monk are seated in the stagecoach with white horses.





Courtesy of Wells Fargo History Museum, San Francisco

### ***The First Pony Express Trips***

The inaugural Pony Express trips departed from San Francisco and St. Joseph on the same day, Tuesday, April 3, 1860. They were scheduled to reach their respective destinations in 10 days. Adding three to four days for regular mail to travel between St. Joseph and the East Coast, a Pony Express letter would reach its destination in 13 or 14 days, start to finish. Using the telegraph connection at St. Joseph, a message could be transmitted between the East Coast and California in just 10 days.

In Sacramento on April 13 at 5:25 p.m., the westbound rider galloped into town and was greeted by a large celebratory crowd. The mail was carried on board the steamer *Antelope* for the trip down river to San Francisco. He arrived after midnight, but was welcomed by a throng of cheering citizens and a band playing “See the Conquering Hero Comes” [10]. The eastbound express rider reached St. Joseph in the late afternoon of April 13, exactly 10 days after departure. The St. Joseph *Weekly Free Democrat* of April 14 announced the news of the first Pony Express arrival:

The Pony Express arrived in our city at five o'clock yesterday afternoon, just ten days from San Francisco. The event was duly and grandly celebrated last night by fire-works, firing of cannon, parade of the military, and illumination of Market square... Twenty, or even ten years ago, the man who would have suggested such an event would have been termed a lunatic. Hurrah, then, for the Pony Express and its enterprising proprietors. Long may they live, and soon be the time when the ‘Iron Horse’ shall supersede the Pony.







### ***Operation of The Pony Express***

The Pony Express ran for nineteen months from April 3, 1860, to October 26, 1861. During this period, there were significant changes in the ownership and operation of the Pony Express. In the most recent book written on the postal history of the Pony Express (Frajola-Kramer-Walske, *The Pony Express: A Postal History*), the authors present a logical division of the enterprise into three operational phases and four rate periods. This structure is incorporated into the chart shown opposite.

The operational phases are as follows:

#### **Phase I —April 3, 1860, to March 31, 1861:**

The Pony Express operated as a private express company owned by The Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company. The express service was not included in the U.S. mail contract that COC&PP acquired from Hockaday (April 1859), nor in the contract that was transferred by the government from Chorpensing to COC&PP (May 1860). Those two contracts paid less than \$200,000 per year, which was insufficient to cover the costs of operating the route, especially with the Pony Express running. Without an adequate mail contract and facing mounting debt, in January 1861 the COC&PP was taken over by its largest creditor, the "Stage Coach King" Ben Holladay, and Majors and Waddell left the firm.

#### **Phase II—April 1 to June 30, 1861:**

This is described by Frajola-Kramer-Walske as the Interim Phase, in which the Pony Express was operated as a joint private enterprise by COC&PP (now controlled by Holladay) and the Overland Mail Company, with Wells, Fargo & Company acting as agents for the business. Prior to this period (on March 12, 1861), the Overland Mail Company won the passenger/mail contract for the Central Route (St. Joseph or Atchison to Placerville) at \$1,000,000 per year, effective July 1, 1861. On March 16 they sub-contracted with COC&PP to run the stagecoach mail route between the eastern terminus and Salt Lake City, and to continue running the Pony Express, which was mandated in the government contract until the transcontinental telegraph was completed. On April 26, 1861, Russell was replaced as COC&PP president by Bela Hughes, who was Holladay's cousin. Although COC&PP continued to operate the entire Pony Express route during this period, Wells, Fargo & Co. took on a prominent role as agent and issued stamps and envelopes.



The "Stage Coach King" Ben Holladay loaned money and equipment to The Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Co. He took control of the company in January 1861.



Bela Hughes, the cousin of Ben Holladay, replaced William H. Russell as president of COC&PP in April 1861.



Wells, Fargo & Co. First Issue—the \$2 Red and \$4 Green Horse & Rider stamps and the Type I printed envelope (unstated \$2 value) were the first Pony Express issues by Wells Fargo & Co.

### Phase III—July 1 to October 26, 1861:

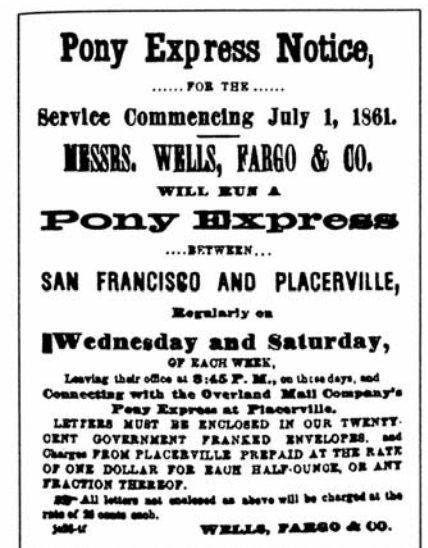
The third and final phase reflects the terms of the U.S. government contract awarded to the Overland Mail Company on March 12, 1861, which paid \$1,000,000 per year for mail/passenger service along the Central Route and required the company to “run a Pony Express semi-weekly at a Schedule time of ten days eight months of the year and twelve days four months of the year...” During this period, Wells, Fargo & Co. issued new stamps and envelopes to reflect the agreed-upon \$1 per half-ounce government contract rate for the Pony Express.

As the chart shows (page 16), the volume of mail increased significantly during Phase III. However, when the telegraph line was completed on October 24, 1861, there was no longer any need to run the costly Pony Express, and a termination announcement was made on October 26. The last eastbound mail left San Francisco on October 23. The westbound mail that was datestamped in St. Joseph on October 24 was carried by Pony Express. The letters that were bagged at St. Joseph for the October 27 and 31 trips were probably carried part or all of the way by regular mail stagecoach, because they arrived in San Francisco on November 18 and 21, in line with the usual 20-day transit time by stage. [11]

The four rate periods that overlap the three operational phases are as follows:

**Rate Period 1—Eastbound April 3 to August 14, 1860; Westbound April 3 to July 30, 1860:**

The first Pony Express rate was \$5 per half-ounce. The early ads also mention a short-distance \$3 rate to Salt Lake City and Carson City, but only one example is recorded,



The ads above were placed concurrently by the Overland Mail Co. and Wells Fargo & Co. to announce the Pony Express service starting July 1, 1861, under the new government contract.

and the \$3 rate never appears in later ads. The amount charged for a letter to be carried by Pony Express—\$5 per half-ounce—was quite substantial. Based on the Consumer Price Index, \$5 in 1860 dollars is equivalent to \$134 in today's dollars. [12]

Because rate changes originated in St. Joseph and had to be communicated to San Francisco, there was a two-week difference between the start dates for rates on eastbound and westbound mail.

**Rate Period 2—Eastbound August 15, 1860, to April 14, 1861; Westbound July 31, 1860, to March 31, 1861:**

The use of extremely thin paper made it possible to reduce the weight of a Pony Express letter to a quarter-ounce. To encourage business, the rate was recalibrated to \$2.50 per quarter-ounce. This rate change followed the period from the end of May to beginning of July 1860, when Pony Express service was disrupted due to attacks on stations by Paiute Indians. When regular runs could resume in July, the schedule was changed to twice-weekly departures from St. Joseph (Wednesdays and Thursdays at first, then Thursdays and Sundays) and San Francisco (Wednesdays and Saturdays).

**Rate Period 3—Eastbound April 15 to June 30, 1861; Westbound April 1 to June 30, 1861:**

When Phase II (Interim Phase) started on April 1, 1861, the rate for a Pony Express letter was substantially reduced to \$2 per half-ounce, down from the \$5 per half-ounce or \$2.50 per quarter-ounce rates in effect during the previous year. At the same time, the new agents—Wells, Fargo & Co.—had stamps and envelopes printed for use on Pony Express letters.

**Rate Period 4—July 1 to October 26, 1861:**

The significance of Rate Period 4 is that it coincides with Phase III of the Pony Express, the period in which the service was mandated by law as part of the contract with the Overland Mail Company. The contract stated that the fee for Pony Express service between Placerville and St. Joseph (or Atchison) could not exceed \$1 per half-ounce. If Wells, Fargo & Co. carried the letter by express to or from Placerville (for example, from San Francisco), an extra express charge was permitted. If the sender used one of Wells, Fargo & Co.'s 10¢ stamped envelopes with the company's express frank, the total amount paid was \$1.20 (\$1 for Pony Express service, 10¢ for the additional express charge, and 10¢ U.S. postage). The Wells, Fargo & Co. ad noted that "letters not enclosed as above [in government franked envelopes] will be charged at the rate of 25 cents each [in addition to the \$1 Pony Express fee]."



**PONY EXPRESS!**

CHANGE OF TIME! REDUCED RATES!

**10 Days to San Francisco!**

**LETTERS**

WILL BE RECEIVED AT THE  
**OFFICE, 84 BROADWAY,**  
**NEW YORK,**  
**Up to 4 P. M. every TUESDAY,**  
 AND  
**Up to 2½ P. M. every SATURDAY,**  
 Which will be forwarded to connect with the PONY EXPRESS leaving  
 ST. JOSEPH, Missouri,  
**Every WEDNESDAY and SATURDAY at 11 P. M.**

**TELEGRAMS**

Sent to Fort Kearney on the mornings of MONDAY and FRIDAY, will connect with PONY leaving St. Joseph, WEDNESDAYS and SATURDAYS.

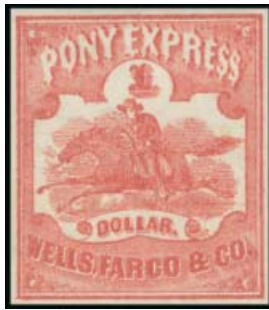
**EXPRESS CHARGES.**

LETTERS weighing half ounce or under..... \$1 00  
 For every additional half ounce or fraction of an ounce 1 00  
 In all cases to be enclosed in 10 cent Government Stamped Envelopes,  
 And all Express CHARGES Pre-paid.

Send PONY EXPRESS ENVELOPES For Sale at our Office.  
**WELLS, FARGO & CO., Ag'ts.**  
 New York, July 1, 1861.

This advertisement was placed by the New York office of Wells Fargo & Co. to announce the start of Pony Express service "10 Days to San Francisco" on July 1, 1861.





Second Issue (July 1, 1861)—the \$1 Red, \$2 Green and \$4 Black Horse & Rider stamps were issued by Wells Fargo & Co. on July 1, 1861. The earliest possible use of the new stamps could occur no sooner than the July 3 trip from San Francisco, the first in the government contract period. A cover from the July 3 trip is shown at left. The \$1 "Garter" stamp was issued in August 1861 at New York City for use on westbound mail.

Since the July 1 commencement date of the Pony Express contract service was known well in advance at both the eastern and western terminal offices, the new \$1 rate was effected simultaneously for eastbound and westbound trips. New stamps were printed ahead of the July 1 commencement date, as evidenced by the June 22 recall notice for the old issue (shown below) and the July 3 cover sent from San Francisco with the new \$1 stamp on the first trip under the new contract (shown above).

The Horse & Rider stamps were used exclusively on eastbound mail. For westbound mail originating east of St. Joseph, a printed envelope and the adhesive "Garter" stamp were used to indicate prepayment. The frank on the "Eastern" Pony Express envelope is similar to the Type I frank used during Rate Period 3.

Rate Period 4, coinciding with Phase III, was also the most successful period of the Pony Express, in terms of increasing volume and maintaining a regular schedule. As the chart on page 16 shows, the number of letters carried by Pony Express basically doubled (for both directions) from the previous Rate Period. Wells, Fargo & Co. proved to be effective agents, and the reduced fee structure and distribution of stamps and envelopes undoubtedly contributed to the increased patronage.

This recall notice for First Issue stamps was sent from the San Francisco office of Wells, Fargo & Co. on June 22, 1861, requesting that "all 'Pony Express Stamps' on hand" be returned on June 29.

Return to this Office on the 29th June all "Pony Express Stamps" on hand at that time.  
Address same to L. T. ZANDER, and Way Bill "Advanced Charges."  
On the 1st of July we will furnish new Stamps with instructions for the service, to commence at that date.  
WELLS, FARGO & CO.  
SAN FRANCISCO, June 22, 1861.

### *Pony Express Markings and Stamps*

Eight types of handstamped markings are known on Pony Express covers. Two were used at San Francisco, one at Sacramento, three at St. Joseph and two at New York. The most familiar are the pictorial Running Pony oval-rimmed handstamps used at St. Joseph and San Francisco. The Running Pony ovals are usually preferred by collectors who want the image of a running horse on a Pony Express cover. However, they are the most common (except for strikes in red or carmine). [13]

Prior to April 1861, fees on letters were usually indicated with handwritten notations. Sometimes these markings were no more than tiny pencil or pen numerals, such as “Pd 5.00.” Other times the notation was more explicit. From the start a rare type of franked envelope was used, bearing the imprint “PAID. CENTRAL OVERLAND PONY EXPRESS COMPANY” in conjunction with a 3¢ or 10¢ embossed U.S. stamp produced by George F. Nesbitt. Only nine examples of this type of franked envelope are recorded, dating from the inaugural April 3, 1860, trip through the January 7, 1861, trip from Sacramento (one is offered as lot 5 in this sale).

Once Wells, Fargo & Co. started participating in running the express in April 1861, they introduced adhesive stamps and franked envelopes bearing their name. The stamps and franks were created to meet the rate requirements of Rate Periods 3 and 4. There were six adhesive stamps in total: the April 1861 (Rate Period 3) and July 1861 (Rate Period 4) Horse & Rider issues for use on eastbound mail, and the August 1861 (Rate Period 4) “Garter” stamp for westbound mail. Two franked Pony Express envelopes were issued for westbound mail: the April 1861 (Rate Period 3) Type I frank and August 1861 (Rate Period 4) Type II frank.

The April 1861 Horse & Rider issue comprised two stamps, the \$2 Red and \$4 Green, corresponding to the single and double rates. The earliest documented use of the April 1861 issue is a \$2 cover dated stamped at Placerville on April 28, 1861 (a way usage on April 27 trip).

The July 1861 issue added a \$1 denomination for the new rate specified in the government contract. The \$1 was issued in a Red color similar to the \$2 First Issue, while the \$2 was re-issued in Green and the \$4 in Black. This color scheme indicates that Red was the designated color for a single rate and Green for a double rate in Rate Periods 3 and 4.

The Horse & Rider stamps were printed by Britton & Rey of San Francisco, using three lithographic printing stones. The \$2 and \$4 stones comprised 20 subjects (5 wide by 4 high) and were used to print stamps in all colors for both issues. The \$1 stone comprised 40 subjects, arranged in two panes of 20 (4 across by 5 high). The “build-up” process used to create the lithographic stones is the subject of a published study, *Wells, Fargo & Company 1861 Pony Express Issues*, which can be downloaded from [www.siegelauctions.com](http://www.siegelauctions.com)



The pictorial Running Pony ovals were applied to mail at St. Joseph and San Francisco. The latter office used the marking with and without a date.

### *The \$1 "Garter" and Franks for Westbound Mail*

The Horse & Rider stamps were never used on westbound Pony Express mail. In Rate Period 3, Wells, Fargo & Co. introduced a special franked envelope for westbound mail, but its use was extremely limited. On July 1, 1861, the new contract rate went into effect. On August 12, 1861, Wells, Fargo & Co. announced in the New York papers that "Pony Express Envelopes" were "Now ready and for sale at our office." Although this announcement refers only to "envelopes," in fact both the franked entires and \$1 adhesive stamps were put on sale in August 1861.

The small belt-shaped Garter stamp looks nothing like the Horse & Rider issues and omits the words "Pony Express." Although Nesbitt was identified as the maker of the franks and Garter issue in an 1867 article, subsequent writers mistakenly attributed the Garter printing to Britton & Rey. Around the year 2000 a Garter stamp was found with the imprint "G. F. Nesbitt & Co. N.Y." (shown here). The Garter was printed from a lithographic stone of 20 subjects, arranged 5 across and 4 high.

The Garter stamp is extremely rare in any form. A strip of three is the only recorded unused multiple on regular paper. Only four covers are recorded, including two from New York City and two from Boston, dated from August 24 to October 26, 1861.

The first Wells, Fargo & Co. Pony Express frank was issued during Rate Period 3, when the express charge was \$2. The Type I frank is printed in red on the 10c Green Nesbitt entire and reads "½ OUNCE/PAID/FROM/ST. JOSEPH/TO/PLACERVILLE,/"



This stamp with the "G. F. Nesbitt N.Y." imprint only came to light around the year 2000 and proves conclusively that the Garter issue was printed by Nesbitt in New York City.



**Lot 20 in this sale:** The Type II frank was printed on the new 10c "Pumpkin" envelope made from thin paper especially for the Pony Express. The envelope was carried by regular U.S. mail to St. Joseph and given to the Pony Express agent.



PER/PONY/EXPRESS.” The absence of a rate was probably deliberate, because by March 1861 the Overland Mail Co. and Wells, Fargo & Co. knew that the contract at \$1 per letter would commence on July 1. Without a stated value, the envelopes could be sold for \$2 until June 30 and \$1 thereafter. As it turned out, circumstances required a new envelope printing. On June 21, 1861, the OMC treasurer in New York wrote to Postmaster General Blair to seek approval of the Pony Express frank and to obtain clarification of the postage requirements on mail posted at the Placerville terminus.

The slightly modified Type II frank was printed in red on the new 10c 1861 “Pumpkin” entire. According to reliable sources, the Nesbitt firm was specifically asked to provide franked envelopes on thinner, tougher paper than that used for the regular stamped envelopes, to reduce weight. [14]

The part-printed address on the Type II frank was added (per the June 21, 1861, letter and sample) to facilitate a new mail-handling procedure. Previously, westbound mail was forwarded in packages to the St. Joseph post office. On arrival the letters were unbundled and counted before they were given to the Pony Express agent. Beginning in mid-August with the introduction of the new Type II franks, individual letters were mailed at the post office of origin and transmitted through the regular mails to the agent in St. Joseph, who gave them to the next departing rider. After the Pony terminus was moved to Atchison in September, the St. Joseph agent bagged the letters he received by mail and placed them on board the train to Atchison.

#### ***United States Stamps on Pony Express Mail***

Over the course of the Pony Express, two significant changes occurred in the U.S. postage requirements. First, the Act of February 27, 1861, applied the 10¢ rate to any mail that crossed the Rocky Mountains, thereby eliminating the use of the 3¢ “under 3,000 miles” rate on Pony Express letters sent across the Rockies, but carried by regular mail for distances less than 3,000 miles. Second, the Civil War resulted in the demonetization of the 1857 Issue adhesive stamps and the release of an entirely new issue, the 1861 stamps and envelopes. For this reason, Pony Express covers from August to October 1861 can be found with the 10¢ “Pumpkin” embossed stamp and 10¢ 1861 adhesive (Scott 68), instead of the earlier Nesbitt and Star Die envelopes or the 1857 Issue adhesives.

#### ***Free Franks on Pony Express Mail***

The company’s stated policy was that express charges would not be waived, but surviving covers show that company mail and some letters from political allies were carried free. The Frajola-Kramer-Walske census records 15 covers with various forms of free franks.

#### ***Pony Express “Way” Mail***

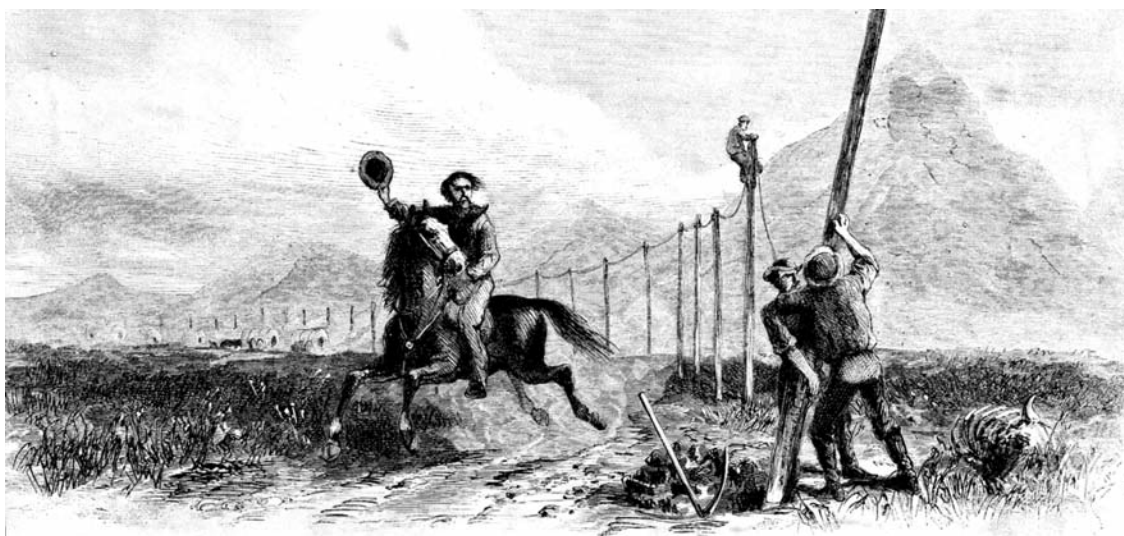
Letters received by the main offices at the eastern and western ends of the route were packaged in oiled silk cloth to protect the mail against the elements, and these bundles were placed in three of the four mochilla pockets. The pocket in front on the left side was called the “way pocket.” All of the pockets were locked with small padlocks, and each home station keeper had a key to the way pocket. When the Pony rider arrived at the home station, the keeper would unlock the way pocket and add outbound mail. If there were any letters for station employees, they would be removed.

### *The Telegraph and The End of the Pony Express*

The value of the Pony Express as a way to transmit news faster than any other means was destined to disappear once the transcontinental telegraph was complete. Yet the electronic communication technology that would soon render the horse-and-rider relay system obsolete actually complemented the Pony Express and made it better. By transmitting telegrams to receiving stations along the Pony route, it was possible to reduce the overall time required to send news from one coast to the other. As the telegraph lines lengthened and the gap between them narrowed, a message could be sent by wire and horse in as few as seven days.

The Overland Mail Company was compelled to continue running the Pony Express as part of the March 12, 1861, government mail contract, but they did so reluctantly. Now that Congress favored the Central Route over the Southern Route—partly because COC&PP had demonstrated its reliability, and partly because the Civil War threatened the Southern Route—the public relations value of the Pony Express disappeared. Running a continuous relay with 150 to 200 stations, 50 to 75 riders and 400 to 500 horses stretched over 1,900 miles was costly. The revenue generated by Pony Express fees was never sufficient to cover the costs. Now the profit-minded directors of the OMC and COC&PP were literally saddled with its cost. However, in negotiating their mail contract, OMC was able to insert an escape clause for the Pony Express; once the transcontinental telegraph was complete, they could discontinue the service.

When the Pony Express started in April 1860, the western telegraph station furthest east of Sacramento was Carson City, and St. Joseph was the eastern terminus for telegraph messages. The Pacific Telegraph Act of June 1860 accelerated the construction of the transcontinental telegraph line through incentives and government subsidies. By November 1860 the western telegraph terminus had been extended as far east as Fort Churchill in Nevada, and the eastern terminus for Pony dispatches was at Fort Kearney. [15] The news of Lincoln's election in November 1860 was sent by telegraph to Fort Kearney and from there by a special "extra" Pony Express to Fort Churchill, where it was immediately transmitted to San Francisco. [16]



This engraving is based on a painting by George M. Ottinger. It depicts a Pony rider passing and saluting pole setters for the Overland Telegraph.



This announcement was published in the October 26, 1861, edition of the *San Francisco Bulletin*. It reads "The Last Pony coming this way left Atchison, Kansas, yesterday." The announcement date is October 25, and the last westbound express from St. Joseph/Atchison was on October 24.

The chart on page 16 contains information about the advancement of the eastern and western telegraph terminals. On August 6, 1861, the *San Francisco Bulletin* printed over its dispatches, "By telegraph to Fort Kearney from St. Louis, thence by Pony Express to Robert's Creek Station, thence by telegraph to San Francisco." In the August 13, 1861, edition, the same paper reported that the Pony Express rider was leaving his dispatches for the *Bulletin* and other Pacific Coast newspapers at Dry Creek station. By the beginning of September, hundreds of miles were cut from the distance between telegraph terminals on the Pony route. The eastern section of the telegraph was completed on October 17, 1861, and just one week later the final connection was made on October 24. [17]

As soon as messages could be sent by wire, the need for the Pony Express was eliminated, and the OMC was free to discontinue the money-losing service. The last trip from San Francisco left on October 23. On October 25 the Wells, Fargo & Co. office in San Francisco announced that the "Last Pony coming this way left Atchison, Kansas, yesterday [October 24]." They probably received that news by wire. Thus, after just 19 months of operation, the Pony Express became a relic of the past.

#### *Epilogue—Wells, Fargo & Company's Virginia City Pony Express of 1862-1865*

The gold and silver strikes in western Utah Territory (to become Nevada) between 1859 and 1863 brought a huge influx of miners and settlers into the Carson and Washoe Valley region. At the beginning of the Civil War, the Federal government moved quickly to ensure that the population of eastern California and western Utah Territory—along with its mineral wealth—remained loyal to the Union. Congress created Nevada Territory on March 2, 1861, carving out a portion of Utah Territory that included Carson City (the new capital of Nevada Territory), Genoa, Virginia City, Gold Hill, and Aurora.



Wells, Fargo & Co. advertisement announcing the start of the "Pony Express to Washoe," dated August 8, 1862, states that service will commence on Monday, August 11, from San Francisco.



Wells, Fargo & Co. and other express companies had long served this region. The transcontinental Pony Express of 1860-1861 passed through Carson City and Virginia City. Therefore, when there was demand for a fast express service between San Francisco and Washoe, it was relatively easy for Wells, Fargo & Co. to organize a horse-and-rider relay along their existing routes.

The “Pony Express to Washoe—Through in 24 Hours” was announced by Wells, Fargo & Co. to start running on Monday, August 11, 1862. The schedule provided for a 4 p.m. departure from San Francisco and arrival in Virginia City by “the next evening.” Letters sent westbound from Virginia City would leave at 6 p.m. and arrive in San Francisco the “next evening, by Sacramento Boat.”

From August 1862 through January 1863, the rate for the Virginia City Pony Express was 10¢ per half-ounce, which was paid by the Brown stamp. Sometime shortly after January 1863, the rate was increased to 25¢, and a new stamp was issued in Blue. The 25¢ rate continued through to the end of the express service, but the stamp color was changed to Red around March 1864.

The 10¢ Brown was used for only six months and is the scarcest of the three colors. The 25¢ Blue was used for one year and is the most common of the three stamps on cover. The 25¢ Red was also used over a span of one year, but during that time the express did not run from July 29 to December 29, 1864. [18]. The suspension of service coincides with a period of violent conflict between Indians and whites in the region. The 25¢ Red was the rarest until the dispersal of the Crittenden correspondence increased the number of 25¢ Red covers, making it the second scarcest, after the 10¢ Brown.

In addition to adhesive stamps, Wells, Fargo & Co. issued 10¢ Red and Blue envelopes with the same design printed directly over their standard express frank, of which a few used examples are known. The 25¢ Red envelope is only known in unused condition.

A letter contained in one of the covers from the Crittenden correspondence stated that the last day of the Virginia City Pony Express service was March 2, 1865. [19]



This 1866 photograph shows Virginia City as it must have appeared in 1862 to 1865 when the Pony Express ran. Nevada was admitted as the 36th state on October 31, 1864.