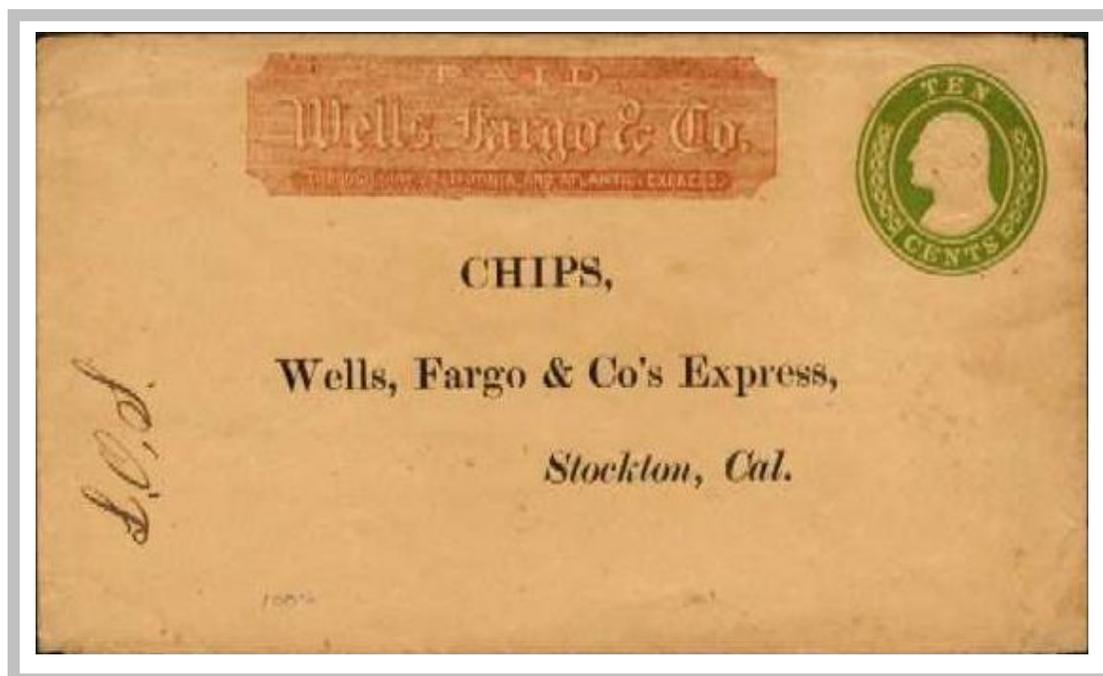


# The Chips Covers – The Postal History Legacy of a Wells Fargo Expressman



Pilsbury Hodgkins, like many of his time, was infected with Gold Fever. In 1849, he hired on to the sailing ship *York* bound for California as a ship's carpenter, earning himself the nickname "Chips." From San Francisco, he proceeded to Stockton and the Southern Mines of Tuolumne County. In addition to mining for gold, Chips also worked part time as a mounted messenger for several express companies prior to becoming a longtime Wells Fargo employee. Among his other duties, he served as a Wells, Fargo & Co. messenger on the route between Stockton and San Francisco from 1857 until 1869. Chips died in 1892, and according to his obituary, his last words were "The Express has gone wrong."

This exhibit highlights items sent by, to, or through Chips during both his pre-Wells Fargo days, and as its most famous Expressman. Historical context, both about Chips and from his unpublished autobiography complement the philatelic items, when relevant.



**March, 1858. Printed Frank in Red.** 10¢ postal stationery envelope with red printed "PAID / Wells, Fargo & Co. / THROUGH OUR CALIFORNIA AND ATLANTIC EXPRESS." frank. Manuscript "L.O.S.", the initials of Chips' future wife, on face. Docketed on reverse "Received March 21<sup>st</sup> at Stockton 1858."



# The Chips Covers

## Reynolds & Co's Express

1850-51



*Fewer than five recorded examples of this handstamp.*

**Reynolds & Co.'s Express. (April 1850).** Manuscript "West Townsend / Mass Apr 22" with "40" (cents) rate for transcontinental carriage. Reynolds handstamp with manuscript "2" (dollars) for express charge for carriage to Stockton and the Southern Mines.

40



**Reynolds & Co.'s Express. (March 1851).** Red "Boston MA / MAR 22" circular datestamp with "40" (cents) rate marking for transcontinental carriage in effect from July 1, 1847 through June 30, 1851. Reynolds handstamp indicating express company carriage to Stockton and the Southern Mines.

Reynolds & Co.'s Express operated from early 1850 to the fall of 1851. Reynolds would pick up mail at the San Francisco post office for designated recipients in the Stockton area.



**Reynolds, Todd & Co.'s Express. (February 1852).** Blue oval “San Francisco” handstamp. Matching “Not Paid” overstruck by two “Paid” oval handstamps. Although endorsed by “Reynolds & Co. Express” by sender, Reynolds & Co. and A.H. Todd & Co. merged in the Fall of 1851. They stayed in business over the same routes only until April 27, 1852 when the company was acquired by C.A. Todd (no relation).



“During that winter [1850] it was almost impossible to get letters from loved ones at home - as there were no stages and no post offices. A man by the name of Brown started for Stockton and San Francisco with every miner’s name for several miles about there, and returned in about two weeks with many letters, for all, of which he charged the modest sum of five dollars each. All were very willing to pay that price and many who did not get letters would gladly have paid more than that for one.”

From the *Autobiography and Reminiscence of Pilsbury Hodgkins*, The Society of California Pioneers, Alice Phelan Sullivan Library. San Francisco, California



**Forwarded by Browns Express. (June 1852).** Blue double-line oval handstamp and “50<sup>Cts</sup>” rate handstamp used in conjunction with “Adams & Co's Express, San Francisco.” Carried by Adams to Stockton where it was turned over to Brown’s for delivery at the Southern Mines. Manuscript “2/” at upper right indicating \$2.00 charge for Adams carriage from San Francisco to Stockton and Brown’s 50¢ handstamp for service from Stockton to the mines.

William A. Brown started an express between Stockton and the Southern Mines in 1850. Brown was murdered in April 1853 but the express continued under his name until Feb. 1855 when Adams & Co. collapsed.



50<sup>Cts</sup>



“March 1, 1851, Mr. Brown, an agent for Reynolds's Express came for me to carry the Express through the mining camps. He had been in business about a year...

“On nearing a mining camp the miners would give a yell ‘here comes Chips’. By the time I would reach the store of the Express Agency, they would be there anxiously waiting for news from home. I carried letters obtained from San Francisco, Sacramento, Stockton, and Marysville, charging two dollars and fifty cents each, and sometimes more.”

From the *Autobiography and Reminiscence of Pilsbury Hodgkins*, The Society of California Pioneers, Alice Phelan Sullivan Library. San Francisco, California



# The Chips Covers

Transcontinental by U.S. Mail - Rates

c. 1853, 1857



**Salem, MA, via Stockton, to Jackass Gulch, California.** Stampless coversheet (separated from letter contents) with red “PAID” and “6” indicating prepayment of the **6¢ transcontinental rate effective July 1, 1851**. Numeral “6” rate markings are unusual, as few postmasters had enough transcontinental mail to justify the purchase of the handstamp.



**Boston, MA, via Panama, to Stockton, CA.** January 4, 1857. “Boston / 4 / Jan / Mass” date stamp and 1857 docketing on reverse. Addressed to “Mr. P Hodgkins / Better known as ‘Chips’” and endorsed “Care of Wells Fargo + Co.”. The **10¢ transcontinental rate effective April 1, 1855**.



## The Chips Covers

Transcontinental by U.S. Mail  
Forwarded by Wells Fargo

1858



**September 3, 1858. Shirley, MA, By U.S. Mail via Panama to Stockton, California; forwarded by Wells Fargo to Martinez, CA.** Manuscript "Shirley, Ms., Sept 3" origin postmark. Received by Chips and readdressed in his hand to his wife in Martinez (no Wells Fargo charges). Blue "STOCK<sup>N</sup> MESSENGER" oval handstamp, "Oct 1st 1858, Stockton" docketing on reverse.



In 1853, Chips left the mines to work full time for Todd & Company at their Stockton office. Later, Wells Fargo & Co., purchased Todd's and retained Hodgkins as an employee. On his first trip from Stockton to San Francisco on May 15, 1857, Chips was responsible for the transport of \$23,111.50 in gold dust and \$4,717.50 in gold coins. By the end of his first 12 months, he had been entrusted with almost \$4.5 million in gold. He worked the Stockton / San Francisco route faithfully for over a decade and may be the "Stockton Messenger" designated by this handstamp.



# The Chips Covers

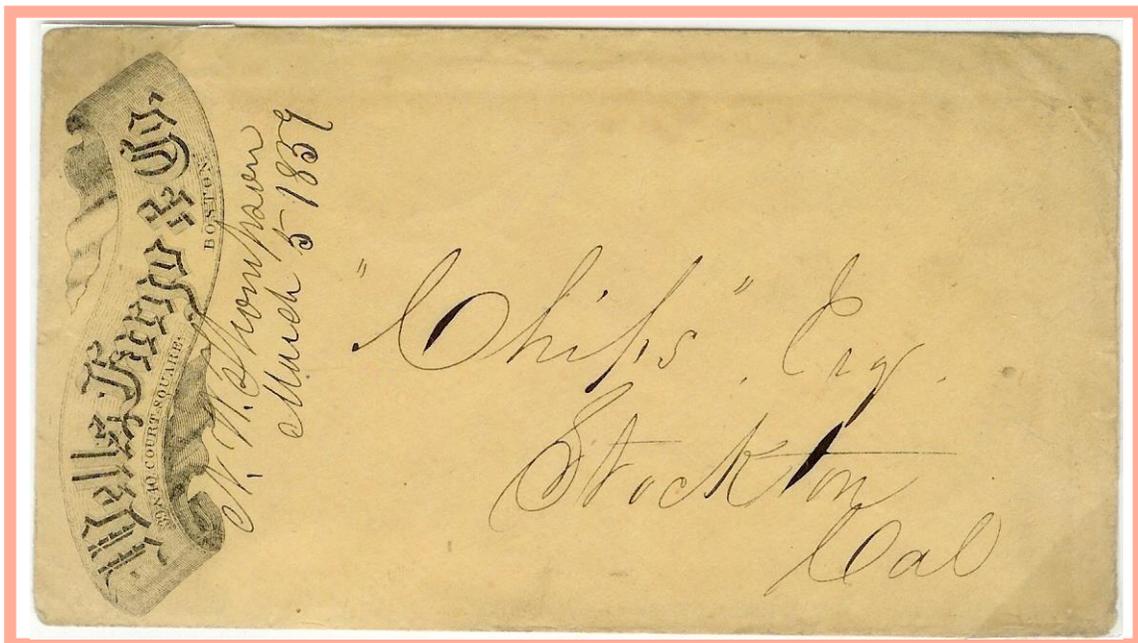
Wells Fargo Boston Office

c. 1859



**Boston, via Panama and San Francisco, to Stockton, California.** Endorsed “Free” in manuscript and sent without imprinted frank as there were no Wells, Fargo & Co. charges on internal correspondence. Endorsed “Valuable” on left possibly prompting the addition of the San Francisco transit handstamp.

*Fewer than five covers with this Boston handstamp have been recorded.*



**March 5, 1859. Boston, MA, via Panama, to Stockton, California.** Docketed at left as sent March 5, 1859. Docketed on reverse “Received March 30<sup>th</sup> 1859 S.F.”

*Two covers with this Boston return address design have been recorded.*



# The Chips Covers

## Wells Fargo California Markings

c. 1855



San Francisco to Stockton. Early San Francisco “Shield” handstamp with matching blue “Free” handstamp probably indicating internal Wells Fargo correspondence.



Boston to Stockton. Delivered to the Boston office of Wells Fargo for transmission to Chips in California. Red :Wells Fargo & Co Express Stockton” and “Free” hadnstamps applied on arrival. Docketed on the reverse: “Recd. Keene Aug 23d/56.” Wells Fargo did not charge the sender or recipient for carriage, as Chips was an employee of the firm.



# The Chips Covers

Transcontinental by Wells Fargo

1858, 1860

Entered the U.S. Mail in New York and Boston



Carried by Wells Fargo to New York where it entered the mails on December 29, 1858. Datestamp with inverted month slug. Endorsed "Chips" on face. Red frank indicates payment of transcontinental express fees.



Stockton date stamp in blue on reverse

Carried by Wells Fargo to Boston where it entered the mails on March 26, 1860. Boston circular "PAID" cancellation. Endorsed "Chips" on face and with manuscript "3\$" and "3Dollars" on backflap. Addressee was the mother of Chips' wife.

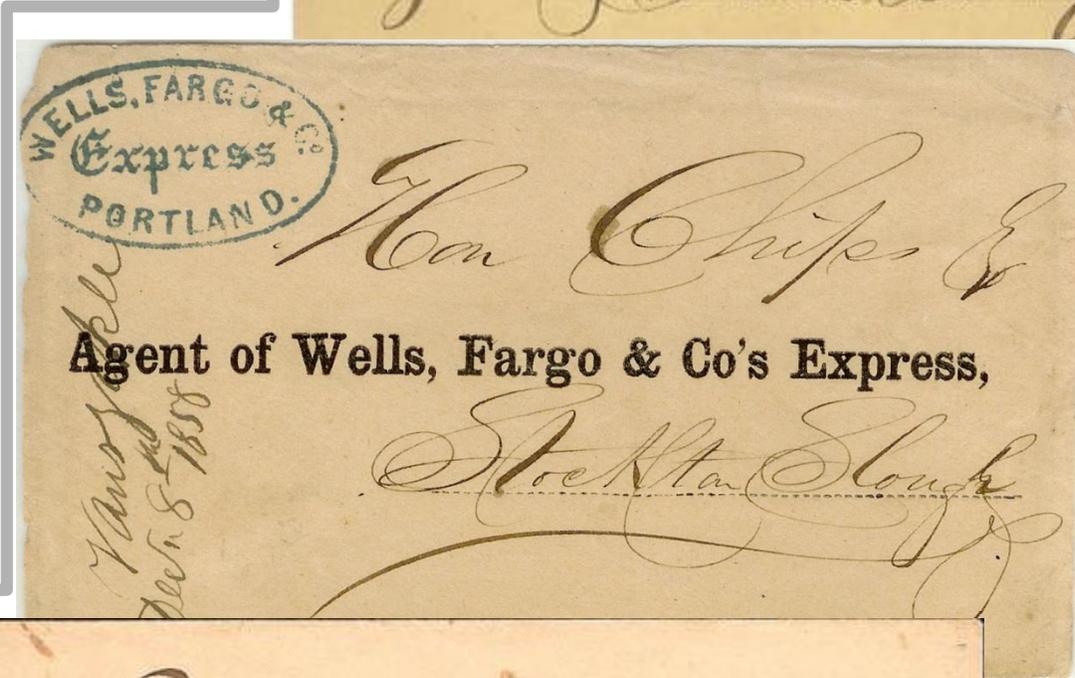
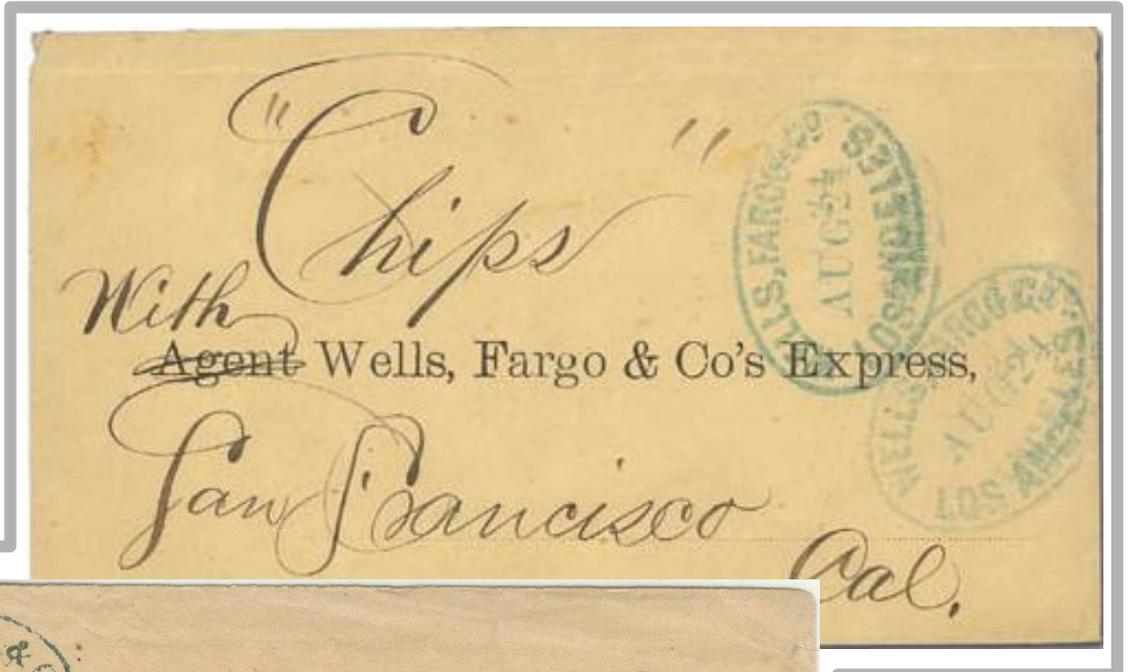


# The Chips Covers

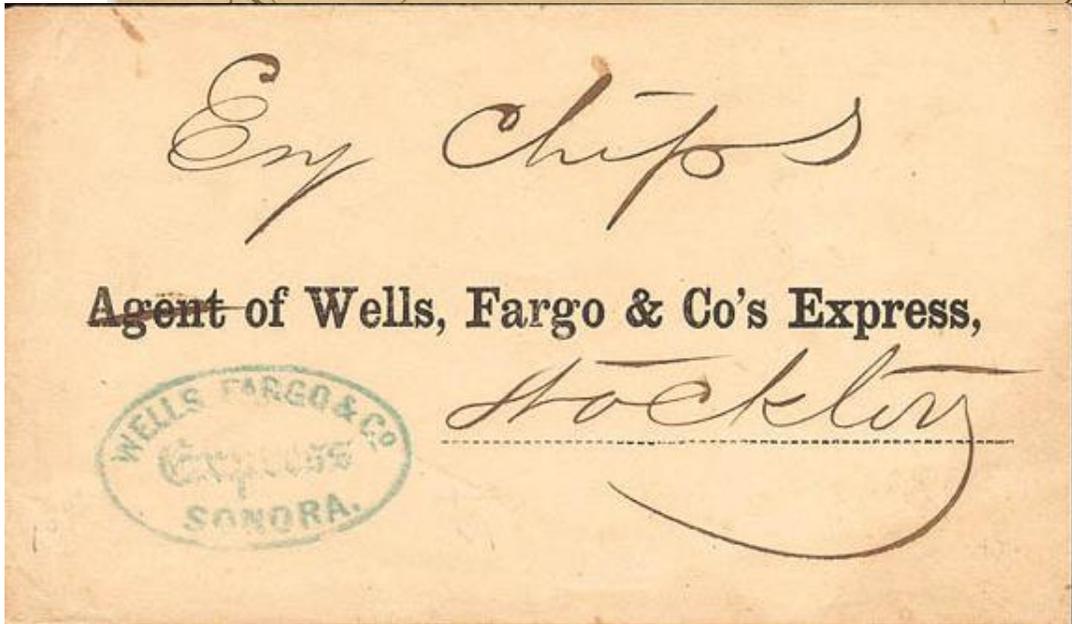
Wells Fargo Internal Correspondence

c. 1858

Los Angeles, CA to  
San Francisco, CA.



Portland,  
Oregon  
Territory to  
Stockton Slough,  
California.  
Docketed  
"Vansyckle  
Dec 8, 1858."



Sonora, CA to  
Stockton, CA.



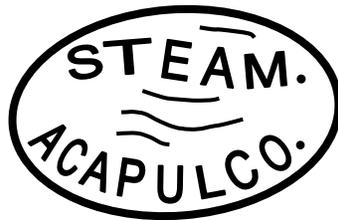
# The Chips Covers

From Mexico by PMSS Contract Steamer

1864



Bagged and placed on a Pacific Mail Steamship Company ship in the port of Acapulco. Entered the mail in San Francisco where November 28, 1864 arrival datestamp, "Steam. Acapulco." handstamp, and "10" rate marking applied in San Francisco. As the PMSC held a contract to carry the mails, letter was charged the 10¢ steamship rate. Addressed to Chips at the Wells Fargo office in San Francisco.





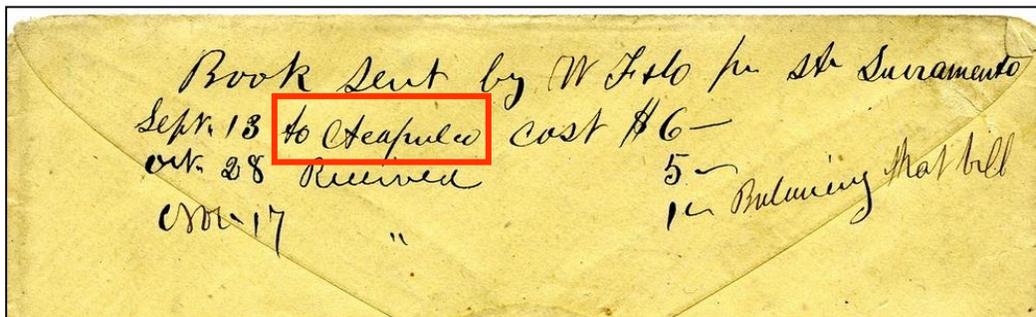
# The Chips Covers

From Mexico by Wells Fargo Messenger

c. 1861



**Originated in Mexico** and likely carried by the Wells Fargo messenger aboard the Pacific steamer to San Francisco. Cancelled at the San Francisco office of Wells Fargo. Notations on the reverse indicate that Chips sent a book by Wells Fargo to Acapulco six days after the receipt of this letter on the Steamer *Sacramento* at a cost of \$6.00, likely in response to the letter that would have been enclosed. He noted receipt of \$5.00 and \$1.00 over the following two months. Additionally, the handwriting matches that on another cover addressed to Chips that also has a “Steam Acapulco” handstamp, indicating that the matching cover arrived on a steamer from that port and that the sender was likely in Mexico.



Scan of notations on reverse with “Acapulco” reference



Matching handwriting of sender on cover from Acapulco



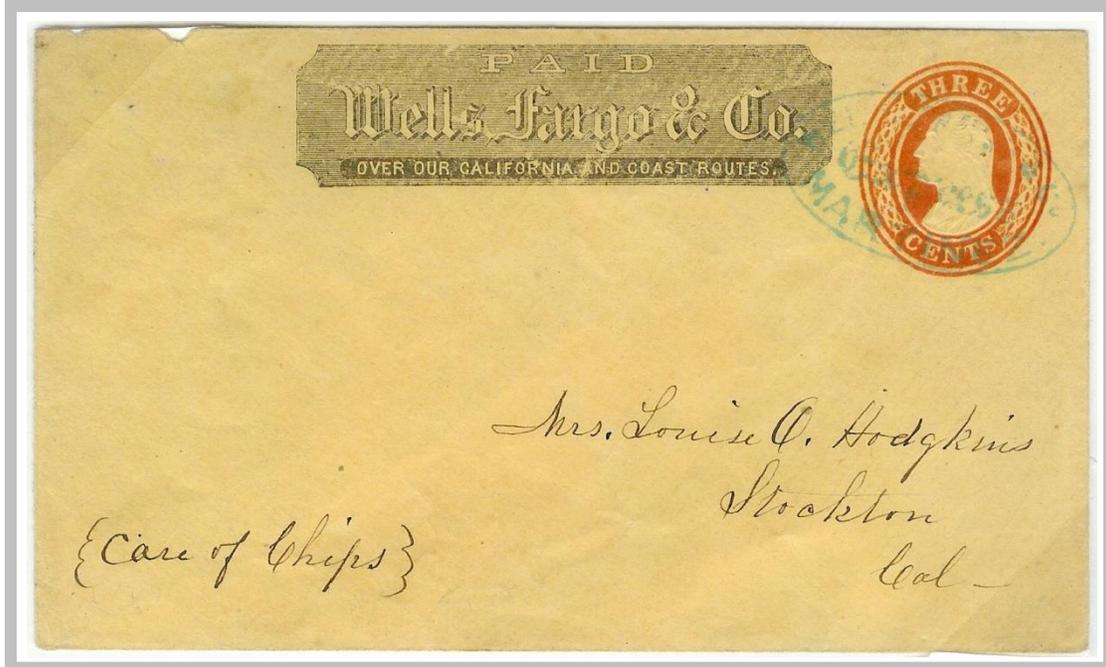
# The Chips Covers

Intra-California Carriage – U.S. Mail and Wells Fargo

c. 1858

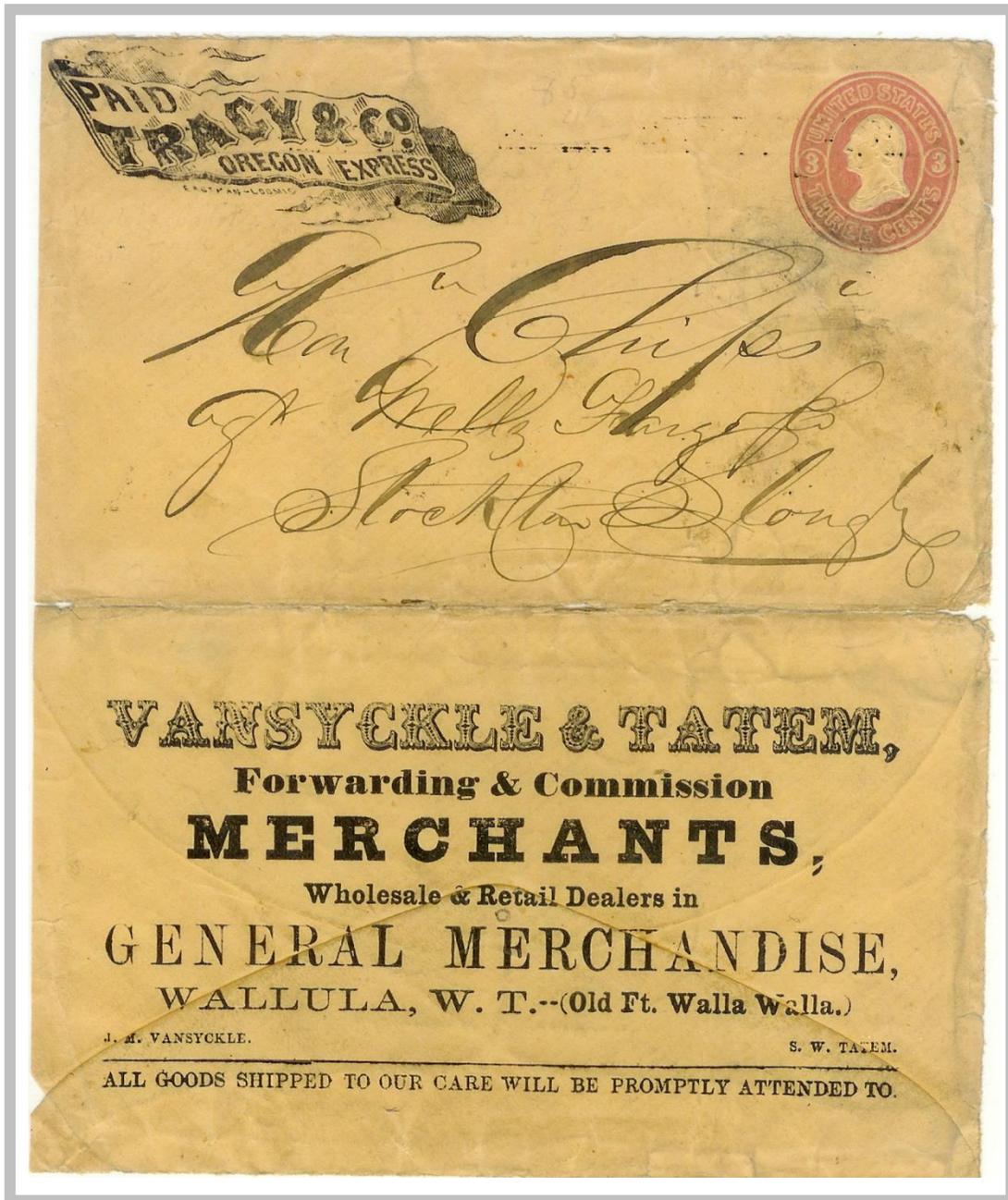


**March 16, 1858. San Juan, CA, to Stockton, CA.** Chips was so well known in the Stockton area that mail addressed solely to “Chips, Stockton, Cal.” would be directed to him whether by Wells Fargo or the US Mail.



**Martinez, California** oval stamp. Addressed to Louisa O. Hodgkins, with manuscript “{Care of Chips}”

Chips courted Louisa Shattuck across the country and they were married in 1858. Letters were easily sent to her using Wells, Fargo & Co. and her well known husband. In about 1860, Chips purchased and drained about 1000 acres land in the nearby Sacramento River delta which he used to graze cattle and supplement his Wells Fargo wages. Due to a subsequent spelling error that became institutionalized, this island is today named “Chippis Island.”



**Wallula, Washington Territory – 1862.** Advertising envelope for Wallula merchant J.M. “Milt” VanSyckle, who had been the Portland Wells Fargo Agent before being replaced by Ned Tracy. VanSyckle moved to Wallula and became agent for both Tracy & Company and the Oregon Steam Navigation Company. Cover opened on three sides for display.



## The Chips Covers

Wallula, Washington Terr. Townstamp

c. 1864



**Wallula, Washington Territory to Stockton, CA.** 3¢ postal stationary envelope with black printed “PAID / Wells, Fargo & Co. / OVER OUR CALIFORNIA AND COAST ROUTES.” frank. Black straight line “Wallula, WT” handstamp that is unrecorded in Leutzing. Wallula, WT was listed as a Wells, Fargo office as of 1864.



**WALLULA WT**

Illustration of handstamp

*Previously unrecorded and only know example*

The handwriting on this cover matches that on other correspondence from J.M. VanSyckle. Tracy sold his express to Wells Fargo in 1862 or 1863. VanSyckle probably became the Wells Fargo agent in Wallula as a result and probably ordered or made the straight-line device above. He would have known Chips from his previous tenure as the Portland Wells Fargo agent.



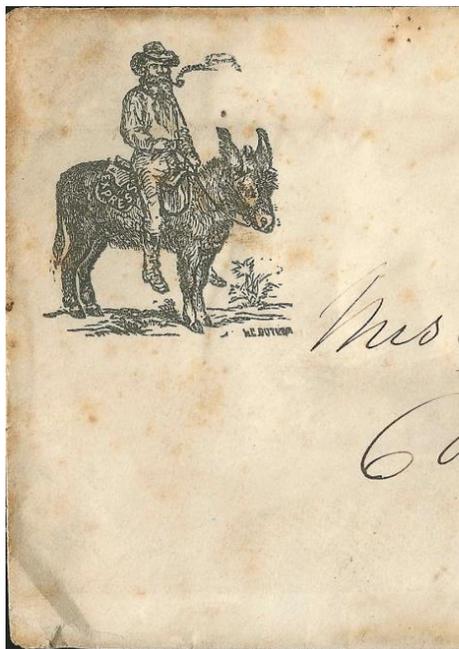
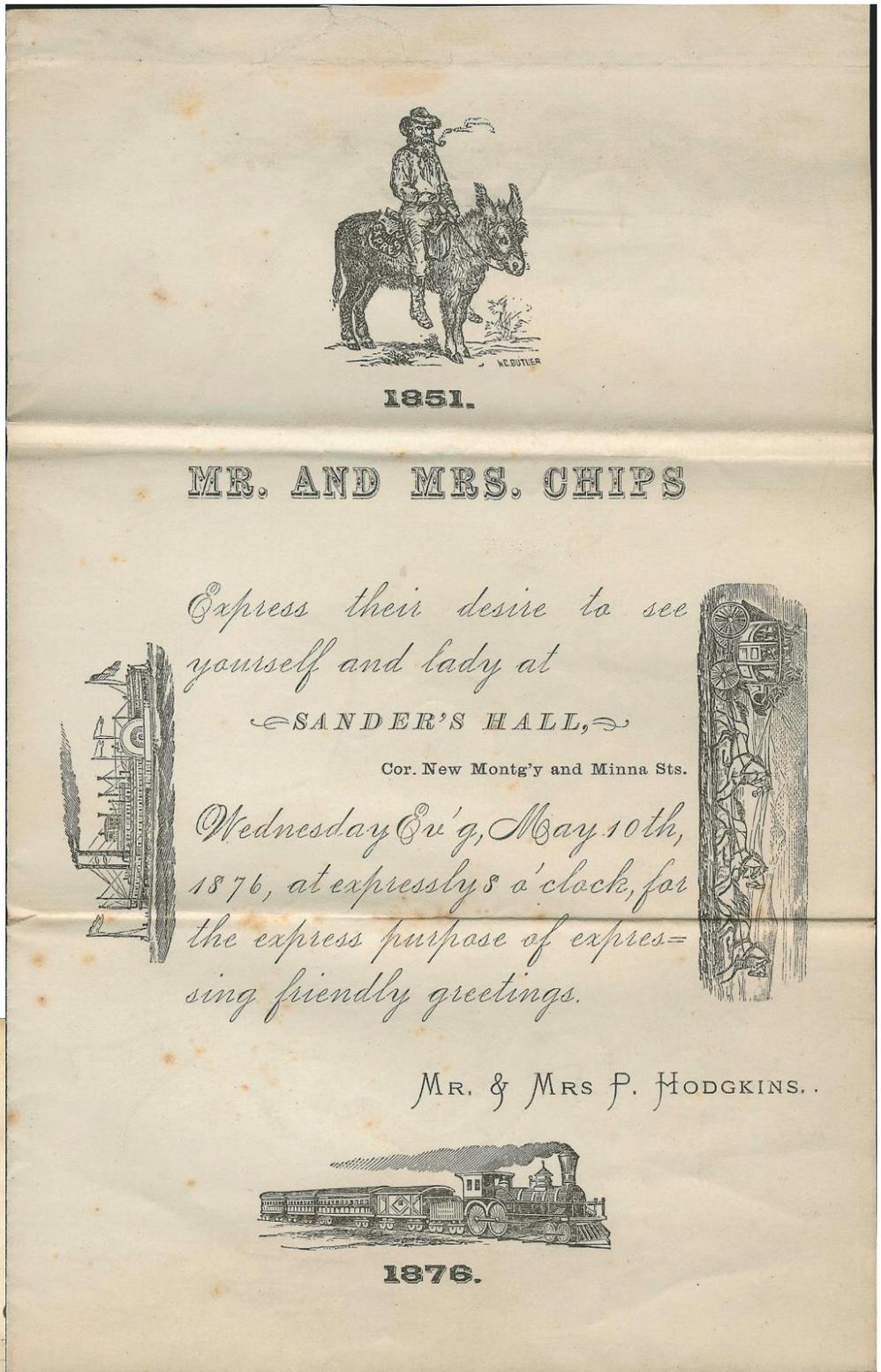
# The Chips Covers

25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with the Express

1851-1876

“In May 1876 at the suggestion of Uncle Henry Wells, I gave an Express Reception having had twenty-five years of continual service in the Express business. About five hundred attended the reception. An address was made by Henry Wells who gave some of his early reminiscences in New York, when he carried the Express matter in a valise. He paid a high complement to the California Expressmen as a body.”

From the *Autobiography and Reminiscence of Pilsbury Hodgkins*, The Society of California Pioneers, Alice Phelan Sullivan Library. San Francisco, California



No postal markings.  
Likely delivered  
outside the mails.