



## Chapter Four

### California Mails, 1821-1849

This chapter describes the mail systems that connected California with the East prior to the March 1849 establishment of the U.S. Post Office contract mail routes and service between New York and San Francisco via Panama.

#### Early American Settlement of California

While Mexico was under the control of the Spanish Crown, all settlement and trading by foreigners was prohibited in the province of Alta California. As a result, when Mexico gained its independence with the signing of the Treaty of Cordoba on August 24, 1821, there were only about twenty foreigners living in the portion of the province that is now California.

Upon the establishment of a republican government in Mexico in 1823, Alta California was not granted status as a constituent state because of its small population, and instead was designated as a territory, with Monterey as the capital.

Mexico soon recognized the revenue-generating potential of a regulated and taxed trade, and relaxed the previous prohibitions against foreign trade and settlement. This effectively opened the California coast and ports to foreign ships and the lucrative hide and tallow trade. Stories about the natural wealth of California also drew some adventuresome settlers to the region, most arriving by ship, and the foreign population of California grew to an estimated 120 persons by 1830. This number grew slowly to about 240 by 1835, 380 in 1840 and 680 in 1845.<sup>1</sup> This growth was fueled in part by November 1828 Mexican regulations which allowed settlement in California by foreigners. However, substantive settlement had to wait for the August 1834 decree by Alta California Governor Figueroa that secularized the Franciscan Missions, and opened up large portions of the desirable coastline property to settlement. This availability of prime land drew ranchers and farmers to the region, and the increase in trade along the coast greatly improved their prospects of economic success. In 1836, Alta California was recognized as a department of Mexico and was granted additional autonomy.

While there is no known mail sent from Mexican post offices in Alta California to the United States, the regional postal routes established in the Spanish period continued to operate. Figure 4-1 shows an 1834 example of mail sent within Alta California during the Mexican period.

This letter was written in Monterey on June 17, 1834 by California Governor Jose Figueroa to Ferdinand Deppe in San Diego. Figueroa was governor of Alta California from January 1833 until his death in September 1835. In his additional capacity as commander of the California military forces, he handstamped the letter with his administrative "Comandancia General de la alta California" cachet and entrusted it to the Mexican post. It was postmarked "FRANCO ALTA CALIFORNIA" and sent to San Diego. This is the earliest handstamped postmark known applied in present day California. Other reported uses handled by the Mexican post office in California bear only handstamped or manuscript rate markings.

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Figure 4-1. June 17, 1834 letter from Monterey to San Diego.

Ferdinand Deppe, the addressee, was a German naturalist working as a supercargo (owner's agent) for a fleet of ships engaged in trading between Mexico and the California coast. In his spare time, he collected horticultural specimens and sketched the California countryside. Figure 4-2 shows an oil painting that he did in 1832 of the San Gabriel Mission (near Los Angeles).

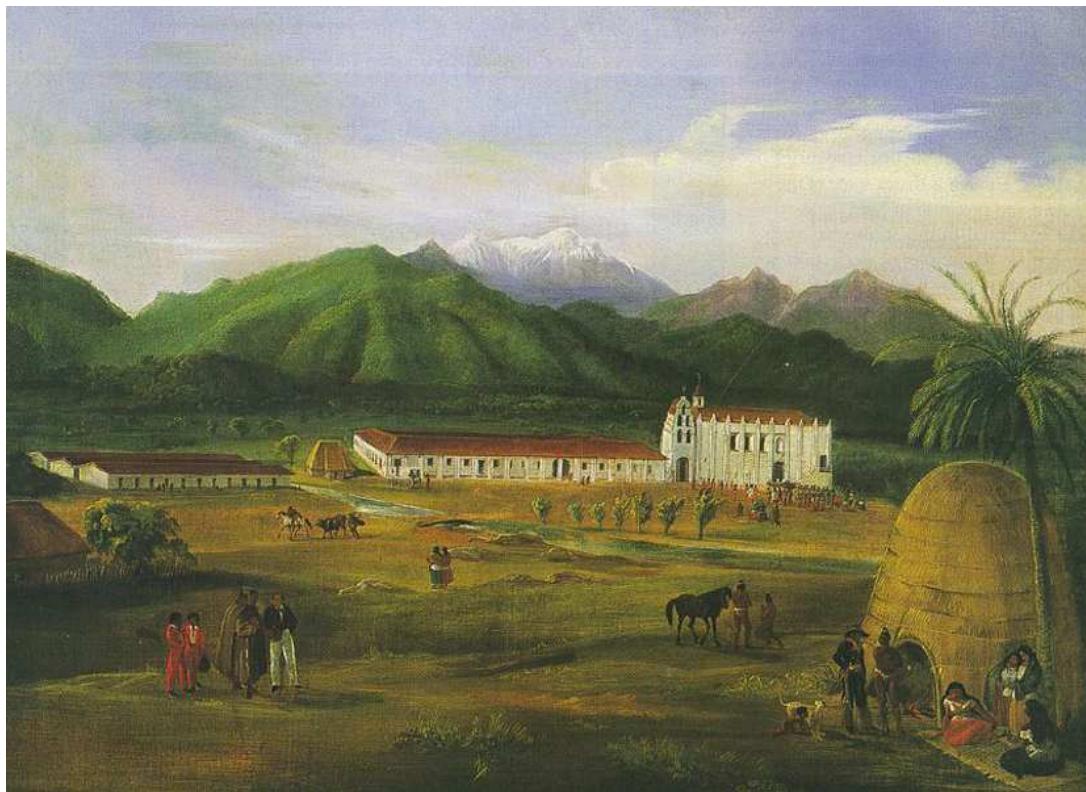
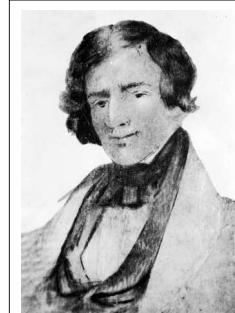


Figure 4-2. San Gabriel Mission painting by Ferdinand Deppe in 1832. (Santa Barbara Mission Archive Library)

## Early Overland Trips to California

The first recorded overland trips from the United States to California were by Jedediah Smith and his company of fur traders, who took two trips to California in 1826-1827. Smith's westbound route was via the Colorado River and the Mojave Desert to southern California, but he returned east by crossing the Sierra Nevada range and following the Humboldt River to the Great Salt Lake. His return route later became known as the California Trail and is shown in Figure 4-3. The next American explorer to reach California overland was Joseph Reddeford Walker, who followed the Humboldt River to Yosemite Valley and Monterey in July-October 1833. Walker made another trip to California in 1838, but there was very little overland emigration to California until 1841.

On May 12, 1841, the 64-person Bidwell - Bartleson party (also known as the Western Emigration Society) left Independence, Missouri with the stated aim of reaching California under the guidance of former fur trapper Thomas Fitzpatrick. This was the first overland emigration party to designate California as its destination. The party reached Soda Springs (in present day southeast Idaho, near Fort Hall) on September 24, where half of the party headed toward



### Jedediah Smith's Expeditions to California, 1826-1827

- Left 1826 fur trade rendezvous on August 16
- Traveled via Colorado River to San Gabriel, California
- Arrived November 27; escorted to San Diego
- Expedition ordered out of California
- 1st crossing of Sierra Nevadas in May 1827
- Arrived at 1827 fur trade rendezvous on July 3
- Left again for California on July 13, 1827
- Reached San Bernardino Valley on August 28
- Arrested in Monterey on October 8
- Left for Oregon on December 30, 1827

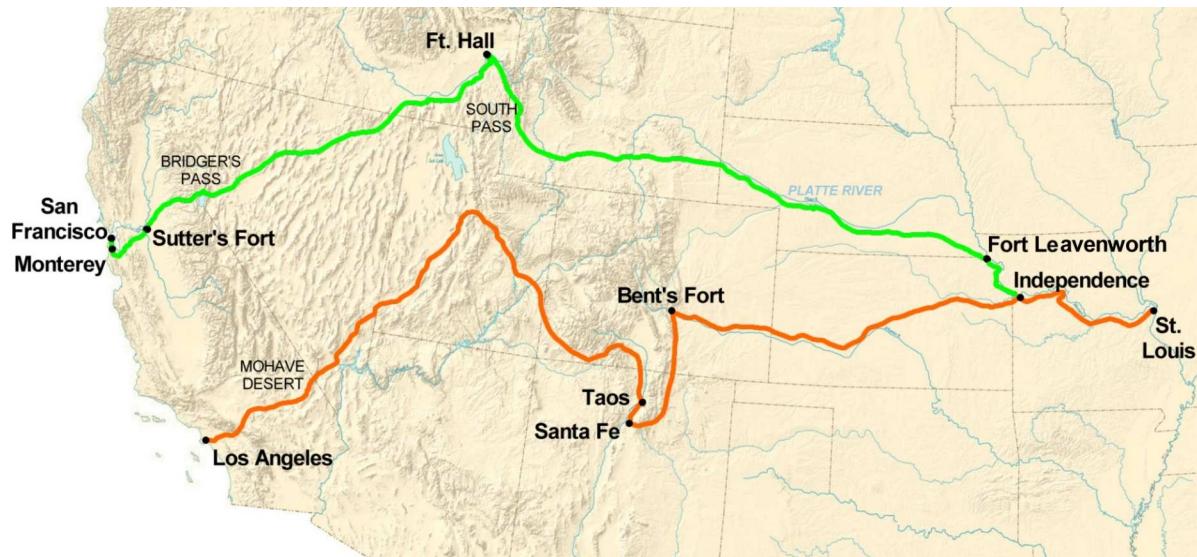


Figure 4-3. Map showing the California Trail (green) and the Old Spanish Trail (red).

Oregon under the leadership of Fitzpatrick, and half continued on to California under the leadership of Bidwell and Bartleson. The California group followed the Humboldt River to the San Joaquin Valley via Sonora Pass. They first viewed San Francisco Bay on November 5, 1841. Another 24-person group, led by

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Rowland and Workman, left Santa Fe on September 6, 1841 and took the Old Spanish Trail via the Colorado River to Los Angeles, where they arrived on November 5.

### Emigration Begins to Build, 1843 to 1848

Even after the success of the two 1841 overland parties, very few settlers came to California. Then, in 1843, Frémont's much publicized second expedition passed through California on its return to the East from Oregon, and Joseph Chiles (who had been with the 1841 Bidwell - Bartleson party) led the third emigrant train to California. Chiles was followed by a growing number of emigrant parties in the next few years, including the ill-fated Donner party in the peak year of 1846.

Even though the overland trip took up to five months, most emigration from the United States was overland, since the alternative routes via Cape Horn, Mexico or Panama were even less attractive. The tedious trip by sailing ship around Cape Horn took up to six months, while the shorter transcontinental routes crossing Mexico or Panama held dangers from disease and attack by bandits. The table below presents the number of yearly overland emigrants to California from 1840 to 1848<sup>2</sup> and the reported population of foreigners in California in 1840 and 1845.<sup>3</sup> In addition to those Americans classified as overland emigrants, there were many who were employed on vessels operating along the California coast. Much of the surviving mail from this period is from Americans on vessels trading along the California coast.

Number of Overland Emigrants to California

<u>Year</u>	<u>Overland Emigrants</u>	<u>Foreign Population</u>
1840	0	380
1841	34	
1842	0	
1843	38	
1844	53	
1845	260	680
1846	1,500	
1847	450	
1848	400	

The number of overland travelers to California dropped precipitously after 1846, in part attributable to the negative reports surrounding the fate of the Donner party.

The numbers in the table above do not include the U.S. military units sent to capture California: Frémont's 1845 Expedition arrived at Sutter's Fort on December 9, 1845 with 60 men; the Pacific Naval squadron brought 2,210 men, including 400 marines, to the coast in 1845 and 1846; Kearney and a portion of the Army of the West arrived in San Diego on December 15, 1846 with 80 men; the USS *Lexington* arrived at Monterey on January 27, 1847 with 118 soldiers of the 3rd U.S. Artillery; the 500 man Mormon Battalion arrived at San Diego from Santa Fe on January 29, 1847 and 770 soldiers of the 1st NY Volunteers arrived

by ship at San Francisco in March and April 1847. Many of these additional 3,758 sailors and soldiers settled in California after the end of the war in 1848.

### California Becomes Part of the United States, 1846 to 1848

Prior to the outbreak of the Mexican War, the United States sent John C. Frémont on overland expeditions in 1843 and 1845 to gather intelligence about the region. The Navy's Pacific Squadron, under Commodore John D. Sloat, was instructed in 1845 to land in Alta California and to claim it for the United States in the event of war.

Following the United States' declaration of war with Mexico on May 13, 1846, Secretary of the Navy George Bancroft sent copies of his formal instructions to take California to Commodore Sloat by at least five separate conveyances. An envelope that likely carried one of these missives is shown in Figure 4-4 and illustrates the long delay and unreliability of communication. It was carried by Henry Lindsey on his trip from Boston around the Horn to the Pacific Ocean. Lindsey departed on June 22, 1846 carrying official dispatches but did not reach Panama until July 23, 1846. By this time Sloat had already claimed Alta California for the United States by raising the American flag at Monterey on July 7 and had turned over command of US Naval forces to Commodore Robert F. Stockton on July 23. While on station off Mazatlan, Sloat had previously received news of fighting on the Texas border and was able to beat the British Navy, also anxious to gain control of California, to Monterey.

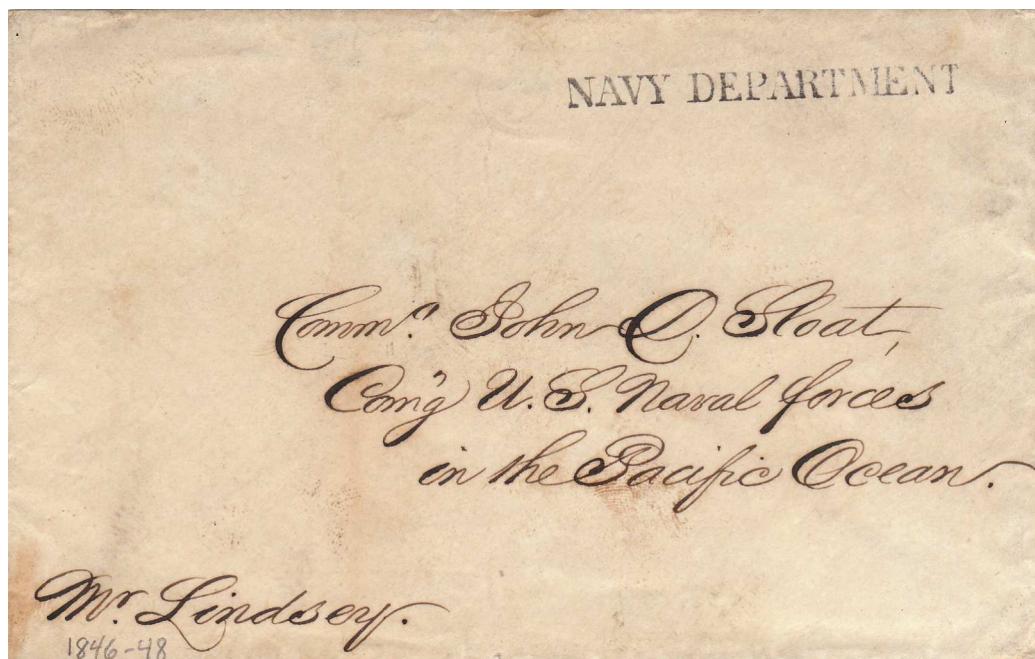


Figure 4-4. June 1846 Navy Department handstamped cover addressed to Commodore Sloat and carried by Henry Lindsey.

John C. Frémont's 1845 expedition, which included Lieutenant C.H. (Kit) Carson in its ranks, was also on the West Coast at the outbreak of hostilities and played a crucial role in wresting control of California from Mexican rule. On June 14, 1846 settlers at Sonoma, with the tacit support of Frémont, had revolted against Mexican authority, raised the Bear Flag, and proclaimed the Bear Flag Republic by declaring California to

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be free and independent. One month later, Frémont and the rebels were mustered into United States service as the California Battalion.

### Kearny's California Regional Mail Service

The United States also sent a military force under General Stephen W. Kearny overland from Santa Fe to California, where Kearny arrived in December 1846. After some initial disagreements between Stockton, Frémont and Kearny, Kearny became military governor. Governor Kearny soon established a regional military mail service that carried the first official U.S. mail on the West Coast.

Kearny's twice-monthly mail system within California was designed to facilitate communication between the various military forces distributed throughout the region. Although operated by the military, letters from civilians were authorized to be carried and all mail was carried free of charge.<sup>4</sup> The Saturday, April 17, 1847 *California Star* announced that:

REGULAR MAIL. Our readers will be pleased to learn that Gov. Kearny has established a semi-monthly mail, to run regularly between San Francisco and San Diego. This mail is to be carried on horseback, by a party consisting of two soldiers; and is to commence on the 19th inst. Starting every other Monday from San Diego, and San Francisco, the parties to meet at Captain Dana's Ranch, the next Saturday to exchange Mails; and start back on their respective routes the next morning, and arrive at San Diego and San Francisco, on the Sunday following, and so continuing.

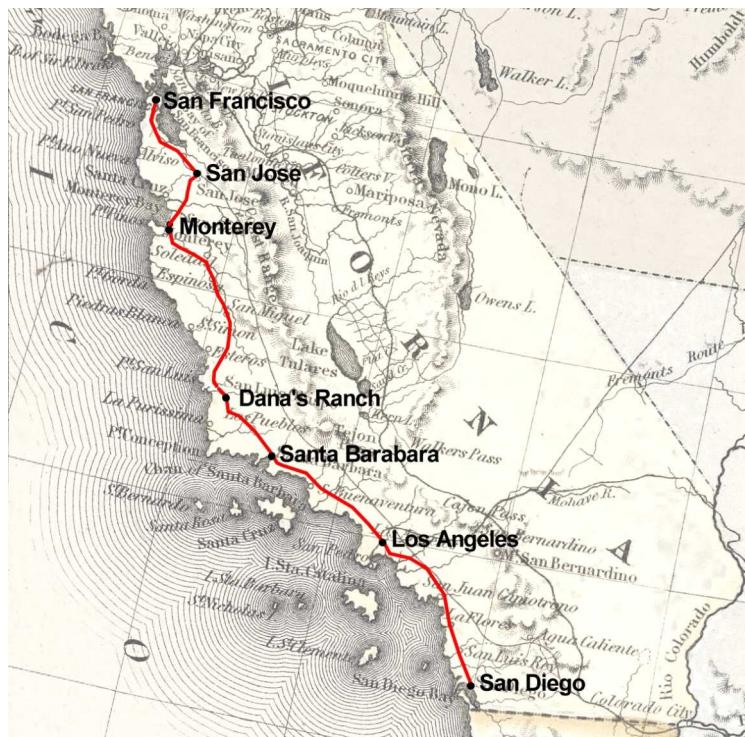
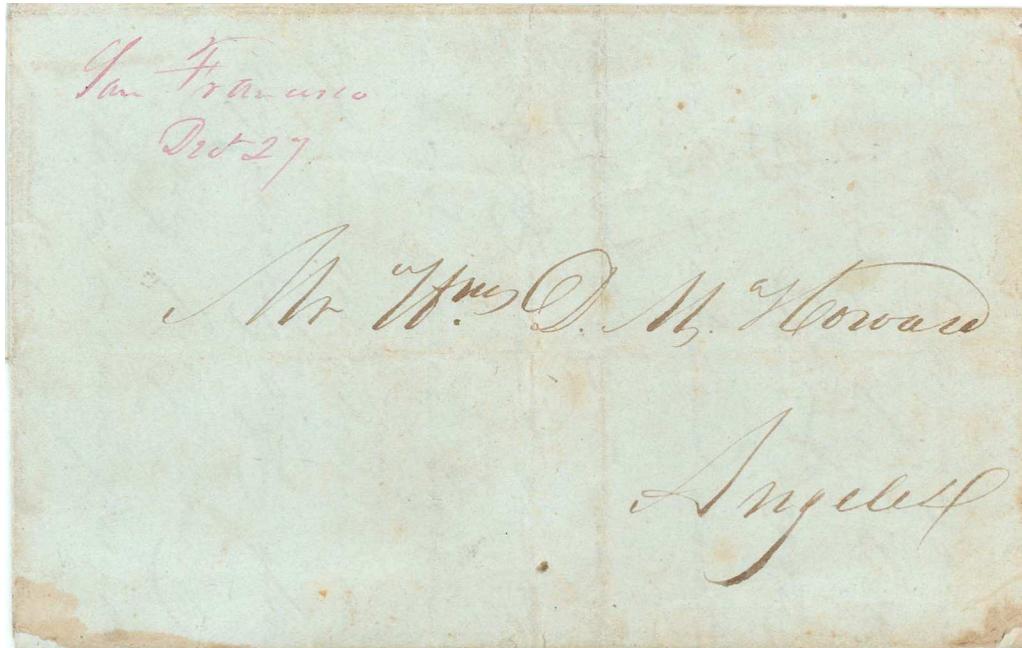


Figure 4-5. Map of the 1847 mail route between San Francisco and San Diego, California.

The route, shown in Figure 4-5, followed a portion of the old Spanish Royal Road ("Camino Real") which had been used since the colonial period to connect the California Missions with Mexico City.

An example of a letter carried on this route is shown in Figure 4-6.



**Figure 4-6. December 27, 1847 letter from San Francisco to Los Angeles.**

This folded letter was dated December 26, 1847 at San Francisco, and addressed to William Howard at Los Angeles. It was endorsed "San Francisco Dec 27" at top in red ink, typical of military endorsements of the time. This endorsement was probably written by Captain Joseph L. Folsom who was acting military postmaster at the time. December 27 was a Monday that corresponds with a scheduled departure. The writer of this letter, Henry Mellus, came to California in 1835 as a sailor before the mast in the ship *Pilgrim* along with the well-known author, Richard Henry Dana. Mellus served as agent for Appleton & Co. in the hide and tallow trade before partnering with William Howard in purchasing the Hudson Bay Co. property in San Francisco in 1846.

Lieutenant William T. Sherman curtailed this service on August 11, 1848<sup>5</sup> by restricting it to the route between San Francisco and Monterey. Shortly thereafter, the establishment of the U.S. postal service in California during the first half of 1849 eliminated any further need for this military courier service.

### Overview of Transcontinental Mail Routes before 1849

Visiting American traders and the few foreign residents of Alta California had few channels available for mail communication with their primarily eastern correspondents. This portion of the chapter will examine those available channels. As new routes and systems became available that provided more rapid transmission of news and mail, they quickly became the primary channel. Although there is some overlap with continuing use of a route after faster routes became operational, the primary mail routes followed a linear progression over time. Overland routes which served as alternatives to the ocean routes were rarely used.

This succession of primary routes follows the following outline, which includes a brief summary, and corresponds to the order in which the routes will be presented.

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**Via Cape Horn (to 1835):** By ship around Cape Horn, a voyage of five to six months. Although this route took the longest time, there were frequent opportunities to send letters by whalers or trading ships leaving for California or returning home.

**Via Mexico (1824-1846):** By ship to the coast of Mexico, overland between Mazatlan and Vera Cruz, and then by ship to the destination. This system utilized forwarders to direct mail across Mexico and mail transmission usually took only two to four months. This route was slow to develop, and became the primary route in 1835 after a reliable network of forwarders was established. It was interrupted by the May 1846 start of the Mexican War and rarely used after.

**Via Panama (1846-1849):** By ship to the coast of Panama, overland between Panama City and Chagres, and then by ship to the destination. This route, at two to three months, was a faster alternative and was chosen in 1849 for the first contract mail service to and from California.

**Overland (alternate route after 1846):** After California was claimed by the United States in 1846, a few transcontinental overland mails were sent by the military or private couriers between Missouri or New Mexico and California. These alternate overland routes took from three to five months.

### Mail via Cape Horn, 1821 to 1835

The earliest mails between Alta California and the East were carried by ship around Cape Horn at the southern tip of South America on long voyages that frequently included numerous intermediate stops for trading and supplies. Figure 4-7 illustrates the route around Cape Horn. It also suggests the appeal of the shorter routes via Mexico or Central America.



Figure 4-7. Map of the via Cape Horn Route, dotted line represents alternate route.

The route around Cape Horn had been in use by the New England whaling fleets since the late 18th century. However, the Pacific Ocean center for the whaling fleet was Honolulu. As trade in foodstuffs, peltry and tallow developed along the California coast after Mexican independence, new trade centers were established. The principal trading ports were at Astoria, Oregon and the California port cities of Monterey, San Francisco and San Diego.

The trading system employed by the New England merchants was usually to send a fleet of ships to the Pacific coast and have them stay there, often for a period of years. The vessels would collect goods along the coast and then transfer them to a single ship heading home. A fleet-owner representative for business matters (the supercargo) would be in charge of receiving goods, making payments, and directing all commercial affairs while at sea. These fleets operated up and down the coast of California and Oregon, often with additional trips to Hawaii. The return ships carried mail from the fleet back to New England and outbound ships carried mail to the Pacific fleet.

The earliest reported letter carried eastward from Alta California via the Cape Horn route is shown in Figure 4-8. It is an 1826 letter from Catalina Island to Ipswich, Massachusetts, and was written only five years after newly independent Mexico had opened its ports to foreign trade. It is from a crew member on the trading brig *Barrian*, John Richards, who wrote to his sister:

Island of Catalina Coast of California Dec. 28 1826

...as I have an excellent opportunity (to send a letter) I shall not omit it. We arrived at this Island about the 25th of last month...we shall go in a day or two and that is to a place called St Diego to get the supercargo of the ship (Thomas Shaw) and he will order us where he chooses for Hides...I expect to cruise up and down the coast of California collecting Hides and fetch them to this Island and cure them and when we have got enough to fill the Brig then start for home...



Figure 4-8. December 28, 1826 letter from the Island of Catalina and carried via Cape Horn to Boston.

There is also a recipient's docket which reads, "Mr. Manning of Brigg *Harbinger* brought this, A.S." This note was added by Captain Aaron Sweet, to whose care the letter is addressed. The *Harbinger* brought the letter around Cape Horn to Boston where it was placed in the mail and postmarked on July 5, 1827, a little

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over five months after the letter was written. Six cents postage from Ipswich to Boston was charged to the recipient.

The brig *Barrian* and her sister-ship *Franklin* later got into a problem over duties with the Mexican officials in Alta California, a not uncommon occurrence. In May 1828, the two ships were banned from further trading until their entire cargoes were landed at San Diego. Declining to do this, they proceeded to Catalina Island to land and cure hides. The next day the vessels escaped under fire from the Mexican fort and were forced to abandon their goods placed in surety in Alta California.

A pair of letters, original and duplicate, are illustrated in Figures 4-9 and 4-14. They show the concurrent use of two different mail routes in 1830, in an effort to ensure that at least one copy of the letter reached the addressee. This practice was not uncommon in the sending of important business correspondence. Both are from the Frederick Huth correspondence addressed to London. The letter shown in Figure 4-9 was written by Scottish trader Stephen Anderson, the supercargo of brig *Funchal*, and is dated "off the coast of California 27 Jany 1830" and endorsed "Duplicate." It was carried around Cape Horn by the *Funchal*.

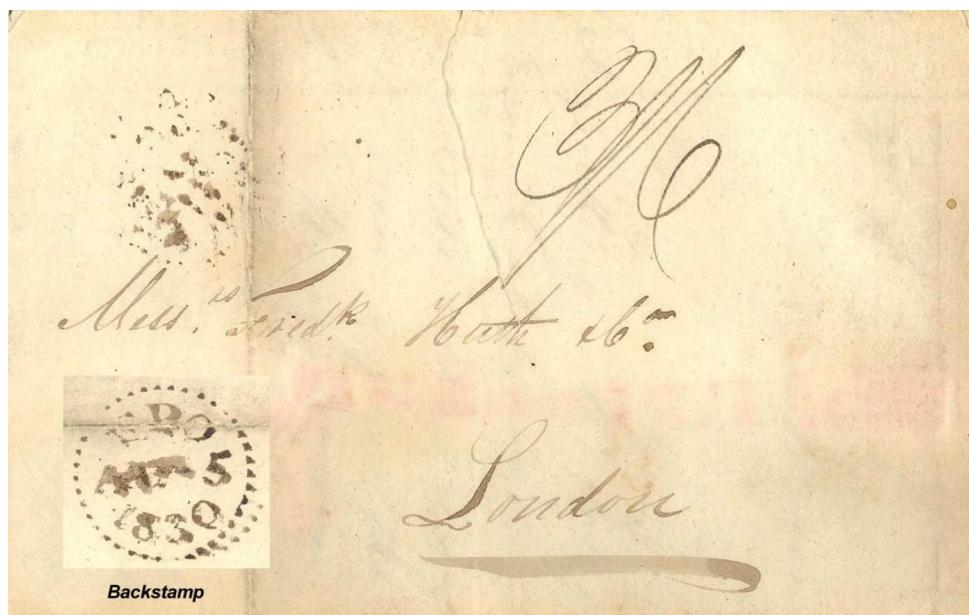


Figure 4-9. January 27, 1830 letter dated off the coast of California and carried around Cape Horn to London on August 5.

Anderson, who remained in California from 1828 to 1832, was writing about a shipment of 16,400 hides that he was sending to London on the *Funchal*, and asked Huth & Co. to obtain insurance for the shipment. The ship's captain, John Hart, added a note upon his June 4 arrival at Rio de Janeiro:

I have to inform you of the *Funchal* putting into this port after a fine passage of 121 days from California. The hides are in excellent condition as far as can be seen under the deck where they have settled. We shall leave this in 8 days for London and hope to have a quick passage.

Hart then sent the letter on a different ship to England, so that it would arrive ahead of the *Funchal*. It was carried by the Falmouth packet *Calypso* from Rio de Janeiro that departed June 18, 1830 and was postmarked at London's Foreign Post Office on August 5 (six months after it was written in California). It

was marked three shillings, six pence total postage due, which includes the single rate packet letter postage of two shillings seven pence plus 11 pence inland postage from Falmouth to London.

A letter carried from San Diego to Boston around Cape Horn in 1842 is shown in Figure 4-10.



**Figure 4-10. October 1, 1842 letter from San Diego and carried via Cape Horn to Boston.**

This largely personal letter was written by James Hastings, captain of the bark *Tasso* at San Diego, on October 1, 1842. He endorsed it to the ship *Alert*, which was returning to the United States around Cape Horn. The *Alert* left in December 1842, and arrived five months later in Boston on May 5, 1843. In Boston, the letter was rated for 12 cents due, consisting of a two cents ship fee plus 10 cents for postage to Sandwich. Interestingly, the *Alert* continued her long career until she was captured and burned by the CSS *Alabama* on September 9, 1862.

Hastings letter includes directions on how to send a return letter to California utilizing the via Mexico route:

Write to me direct Capt SJH Barque Tasso, Coast of Alta California  
Care of Don Frederico Becker (at) Mazatlan. Send it to Cozzens in New York (and) get him to pay  
25cts postage and put it on board the Vera Cruz packet.

A letter from California carried first to Hawaii and then around the Horn is shown in Figure 4-11. It is an Appleton & Company correspondence letter to Boston from Capt. James Hatch of the Appleton-owned ship *Barnstable* at "St. Francisco" (San Francisco) and is dated July 30, 1844. The letter mentions that the *Barnstable* had collected 25,000 hides, the probability of war with Mexico and, as a portent of things to come, "We have also ... some Pueblo Gold."



Figure 4-11. July 30, 1844 letter dated at “St. Francisco” sent via Hawaii and around Cape Horn to Boston.

The letter was endorsed “Favored by Capt Flere Barque Brothers” at top and to “the care of Hiram Grimes Esq., Honolulu, Sandwich Islands” at bottom. The letter was carried by the British bark *Brothers* that departed from San Francisco on August 1 and arrived at Honolulu on August 18, 1844. After receipt, Hiram Grimes placed the letter on the American whaling ship *Corvo* that departed Honolulu on September 7, 1844 and arrived at Stonington, Connecticut on February 26, 1845. The letter was postmarked at Stonington the following day as a ship letter with 14½ cents postage due which includes the two cents ship fee.

A westbound example from the period during which the United States was gaining control of California in 1846 is shown in Figure 4-12. The August 11, 1846 letter from East Boston was addressed to a sailor on the Appleton-owned trading bark *Tasso* on the coast of California. The addressee, Henry F. Teschemacher, later became Mayor of San Francisco in 1859. The letter, from the sailor’s mother mentions:

I had almost despaired of a chance occurring this summer of sending you out letters (that is with any reasonable likelihood of your obtaining them) but your Father has just apprized me that he proposes writing by the ‘Independence’ a vessel of war about to proceed immediately to your coast.

The letter was endorsed at the top to be carried by the USS *Independence*. It bears an oval handstamp of the “NAVAL LIBRARY & INSTITUTE, U.S. NAVY YARD, BOSTON” on the reverse to indicate the Naval Library’s handling as mail forwarder to a navy ship, an unusual occurrence for mail not addressed to navy personnel. The USS *Independence* departed from Boston on August 29, 1846 and stopped at Rio de Janeiro on its way around Cape Horn. She entered Monterey Bay on January 22, 1847, slightly more than five months after the letter was written.

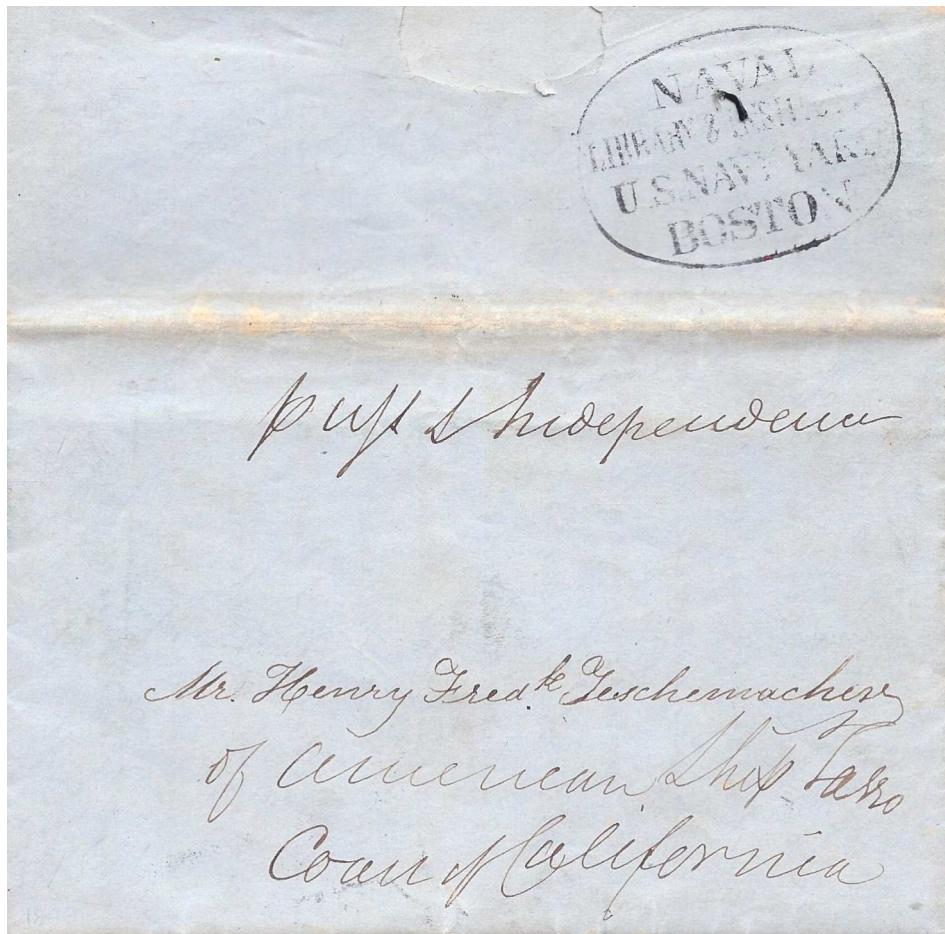


Figure 4-12. August 11, 1846 letter from East Boston carried by USS *Independence* around the Horn to the coast of California.

### Mail via Mexico, 1824 to 1846

In his 1842 letter (Figure 4-10), James Hastings instructed his eastern correspondent to send letters via Vera Cruz and overland to Mazatlan on the west coast of Mexico. The map in Figure 4-13 shows that the route between these two points passed through Mexico City.

On the Atlantic side, this route relied on the British mail packets operating to Vera Cruz and on American ships operating directly between New Orleans and Vera Cruz. In 1825, Great Britain established full diplomatic relations with Mexico and British postal agencies were established at Vera Cruz and Mexico City. The British already had an extensive system of packet service to their colonies in the West Indies and a monthly service between Vera Cruz and Kingston, Jamaica with onward service to Falmouth, England was inaugurated in 1825. After January 1, 1842 these monthly packets were replaced by a twice-monthly contract service provided by the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company (RMSP), and the new scheme included provisions for a more direct service from Havana, Cuba to Vera Cruz. This improved service, coupled with the many American trading vessels stopping at Havana, propelled this route into supremacy for mails to and from the Pacific Ocean. This primacy lasted until mid-1846 when the route was abandoned due to the outbreak of the Mexican-American War.

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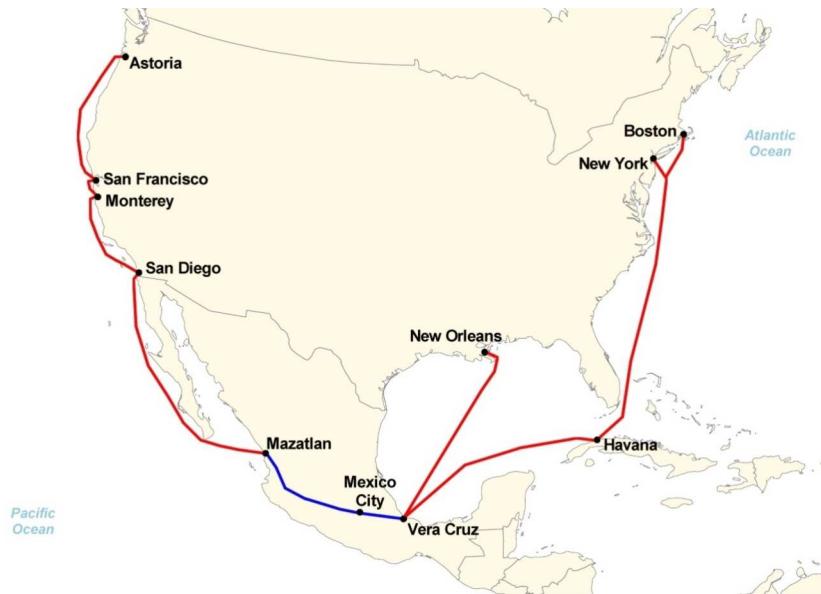


Figure 4-13. Map of the via Mexico route.

American forwarding agents at Havana and New York played an important role in expediting mail transfer to the RMSP steamers. At Vera Cruz, the U.S. Consul acted as forwarder, and other private forwarders also handled mails.

Mail was carried across Mexico between Vera Cruz and Mazatlan by private means, by diplomatic pouch, or by the Mexican post office. Packages which included multiple letters were frequently transmitted by the Mexican mails to save postage.

On the Pacific Ocean side, there were many American ships operating between Mazatlan and the California ports. At Mazatlan, the American Consul and private forwarding agents were available to perform mail handling services. Westbound mail could be given to one of the ship captains heading up the coast of California and mail was often directed to Thomas A. Larkin at Monterey. Larkin was appointed to be U.S. Consul in Monterey in 1843 and although President Tyler signed the appointment in January 1844, Larkin did not receive his official papers until April 2, 1844.<sup>6</sup>

A letter from the U.S. Consul John Parrott at Mazatlan to Larkin<sup>7</sup> advised him that the rate to be charged for letters, forwarded through his office, to eastern points was “fifty cents a single sheet and more according to weight.”

The earliest reported letter to have taken the route via Mexico is shown in Figure 4-14. It was datelined “California Sa. Barbara 24 Jany 1830” and endorsed “p. Via Mexico” in the dateline. This is the original to the duplicate letter illustrated in Figure 4-9, written by Scottish trader Stephen Anderson three days earlier. He wrote:

I have no doubt ere now your Lima house has advised you of my intention of shipping by the London Brig “Funchal” John Hart master a cargo of Hides for your market and to your consignment. I have now to inform you she has just finished loading in this port and will sail in a few days with sixteen thousand four hundred fine dry salted hides consisting of Ox, Cow and a few Bulls, all in superior order of which I beg to enclose you the Bill of Lading.

He then requested that Huth & Co. obtain insurance on the cargo, valued at 12 shillings per hide.

The letter was carried by ship from Santa Barbara to Mazatlan, Mexico, and then overland to Vera Cruz, where it caught the British ship *Princess Elisabeth* on June 14. It then travelled via Kingston, Jamaica to Falmouth, England. It was postmarked at the London Foreign Post Office on August 2 (a little over six months after the letter was written) and charged six shillings, representing double two shillings one pence packet postage from Vera Cruz plus double 11 pence inland postage from Falmouth to London.

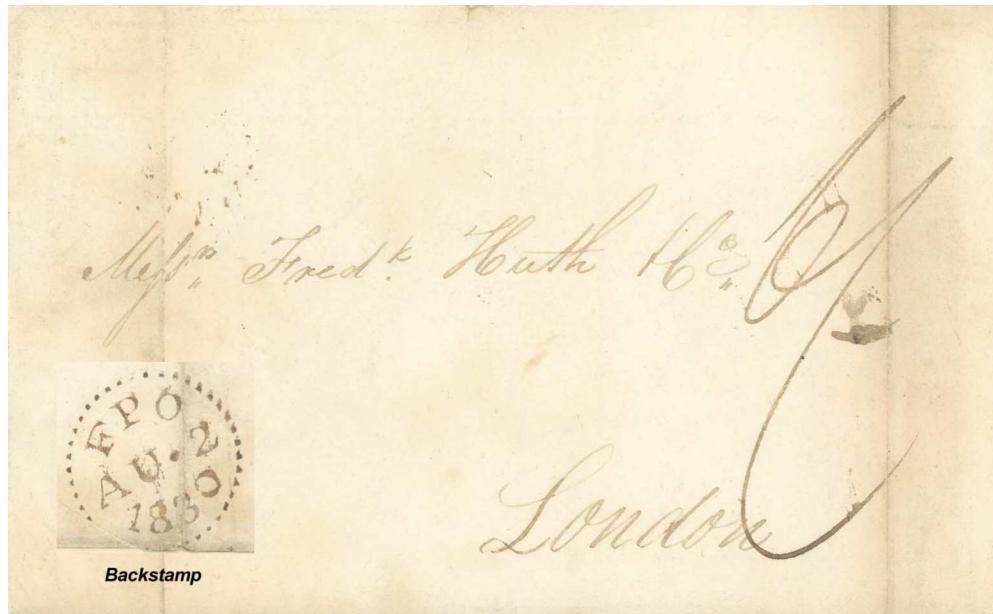


Figure 4-14. January 24, 1830 letter from Santa Barbara, California carried via Mexico to London.

Another eastbound example, but addressed to the United States, is shown in Figure 4-15.



Figure 4-15. December 3, 1843 letter from Monterey sent via Mazatlan and New York on March 18.

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This letter was written by Captain Peterson of the ship *Admittance* at Monterey, on December 3, 1843. He wrote to the owners of the *Admittance* that, "By Mr. Larkin a resident of Monterey and going to the city of Mexico I forward this." Larkin, the U.S. consul in Monterey, carried it to Mazatlan, and placed it in the Mexican mails, prepaid 4 reales. Accordingly, it was marked "FRANCO PUERTO DE MAZATLAN" (prepaid at the port of Mazatlan) with a black "4" on the reverse, representing four reales postage paid. At Vera Cruz, it was placed on the bark *Eugenia* that departed February 27, 1844 for New York. It arrived on March 18, just three and a half months after it was written. New York rated it for 27 cents due, consisting of double postage to Boston, plus a two cents ship fee.

The *Admittance* was a sister ship to the *Tasso* and *Barnstable* (all owned by Appleton & Co. of Boston), and engaged in the hide and tallow trade on the California coast from October 1843 to May 1845.

While the letter in Figure 4-15 entered the Mexican mails at Mazatlan the eastbound letter shown in Figure 4-16 entered the Mexican mails at Vera Cruz.



Figure 4-16. March 2, 1845 letter from San Diego sent via Mazatlan, Vera Cruz and New Orleans.

This letter was begun at sea on February 2, 1845 by John C. Bull, first officer on the ship *Tasso*, and completed at San Diego on March 2. He indicated in his letter that he expected the *Tasso*'s sister ship *Barnstable* to carry it on its return trip to the U.S., but as that ship had left San Diego over two months earlier, Bull routed the letter to Mazatlan instead. He commented about the Mexico "overland" route that,

...the postage overland being so very Extravagant about \$1 25cts per letter probably the next letter you receive will be in about 18 months from Date as the ship Admittance will not leave the coast til that time...

The letter was endorsed to Mazatlan forwarder Scarborough & Co., but the successor firm of Mott Talbot & Co. (per their forwarder handstamp) arranged to get it to Vera Cruz, where it was postmarked "Franqueado Veracruz" on April 14. It was then carried by the schooner *Creole* that departed on April 22 and arrived at New Orleans on May 6 (only two months after being written). It was postmarked and rated for 52 cents double rate due, which included a 2 cents ship fee.

The *Tasso* (see Figure 4-25 for another letter from Bull) first arrived in San Diego on February 12, 1845 after a six-month voyage from Boston around Cape Horn. It was active in trading for Appleton & Co. along the California coast until it was sold at San Francisco on August 27, 1848.

Figure 4-17 shows an 1844 eastbound letter forwarded by the U.S. consul at Vera Cruz.



Figure 4-17. June 24, 1844 letter from Monterey sent via Mazatlan, Vera Cruz and New Orleans.

## 4 - CALIFORNIA MAIIS, 1821-1849

This letter was written on June 24, 1844 by Thomas Larkin, U.S. consul at Monterey, and directed that return mail was to be sent to the “care of John Parrot, Esq. Mazatlan via Vera Cruz y Mexico & post pd. in Boston will reach.”

Larkin’s letter was sent under cover via Mazatlan and then by private courier to Vera Cruz, where the U.S. consul, Francis M. Dimond, noted on the reverse, “Re’d Vera Cruz Aug 3d 1844 and forwarded by your Ob St.” He placed the letter on the Mexican schooner *Rosetta* that departed on August 4 for New Orleans, and which arrived late on August 20, only two months after the letter left California. It was postmarked as a ship letter on August 21 and rated 27 cents postage due, consisting of the two cents ship fee plus the 25 cents rate to Boston.

The letter shown in Figure 4-18 is another letter written by Henry Mellus (see also Figure 4-6) in 1845. At that time, he was supercargo of the Appleton-owned ship *Admittance* at Monterey.



Figure 4-18. January 20, 1845 letter from Monterey sent via Mexico and New Orleans.

This letter was a commercial report datelined at Monterey on January 20, 1845 and sent to Appleton & Co. in Boston. Mellus entrusted it to the American consul in Monterey, Thomas Larkin, who put his forwarding mark on the reverse and arranged to have it forwarded under cover to Mazatlan. It was likely carried by the American bark *Quixote* from Monterey to Mazatlan. In Mazatlan, it was forwarded without

directly entering the Mexican mails, via the British Consuls at Mexico City and Vera Cruz. At Vera Cruz, it was placed onboard the HMS *Eurydice*, a most unusual circumstance of carriage by a British Navy vessel which was the result of British diplomats shuttling between Vera Cruz and New Orleans during the unrest over Texas. The *Eurydice* arrived at Balize, off New Orleans, on May 31, 1845 and newspapers report that private letters as well as official dispatches were off-loaded. This letter was postmarked at New Orleans on June 1 as a ship letter and was rated for 27 cents postage due being the two cent ship fee plus the 25 cent rate to Boston.

In his letter Mellus gave some insight into the instability of the via Mexico route when he wrote, "We cannot expect letters from Mazatlan, as the only vessel to have come from there was a schooner now probably seized by the revolutionaries in that quarter."

While previous examples of mail carried via Mexico have all been eastbound, a westbound use is shown in Figure 4-19.



Figure 4-19. August 29, 1843 letter from Boston to Monterey via Mexico.

The letter, dated August 29, 1843 at Boston was written by Benjamin Reed, owner of the trading ship *California*, which was collecting otter pelts on the California coast. It is addressed to William D.M. Howard at Monterey, California who at the time was supercargo for Reed's ship (see Figure 4-6 for another example of a letter addressed to Howard). The letter is endorsed to the care of John Parrott, U.S. Consul at

## 4 - CALIFORNIA MAIIS, 1821-1849

Mazatlan. Before entering the Mexican mails, the letter was possibly handled by a New York forwarder who sent it under cover to Havana, where it caught the RMS monthly mail packet *Thames* that departed from Havana on October 18 and arrived at Vera Cruz on October 23, 1843. It entered the mails at Vera Cruz on October 28 with their postmark and four reales due handstamp. Consul John Parrott in Mazatlan then forwarded the letter to Thomas O. Larkin on the brig *Juanita* bound for the Columbia River after a stop in Monterey. Larkin stamped his forwarding agent handstamp on the reverse and added a note to Howard, "Rec'd from a passenger of the *Juanita* day after you sailed. T.O.L. – Postage chgd to me by Mr. P." Howard apparently did not return to Monterey on the *California* and likely received this letter while at the port of Yerba Buena (San Francisco) in December 1843.

Figure 4-20 shows a letter that, although dated from Honolulu, was carried via California and Mexico immediately following the U.S. – Mexican War and is a very late use of the route.

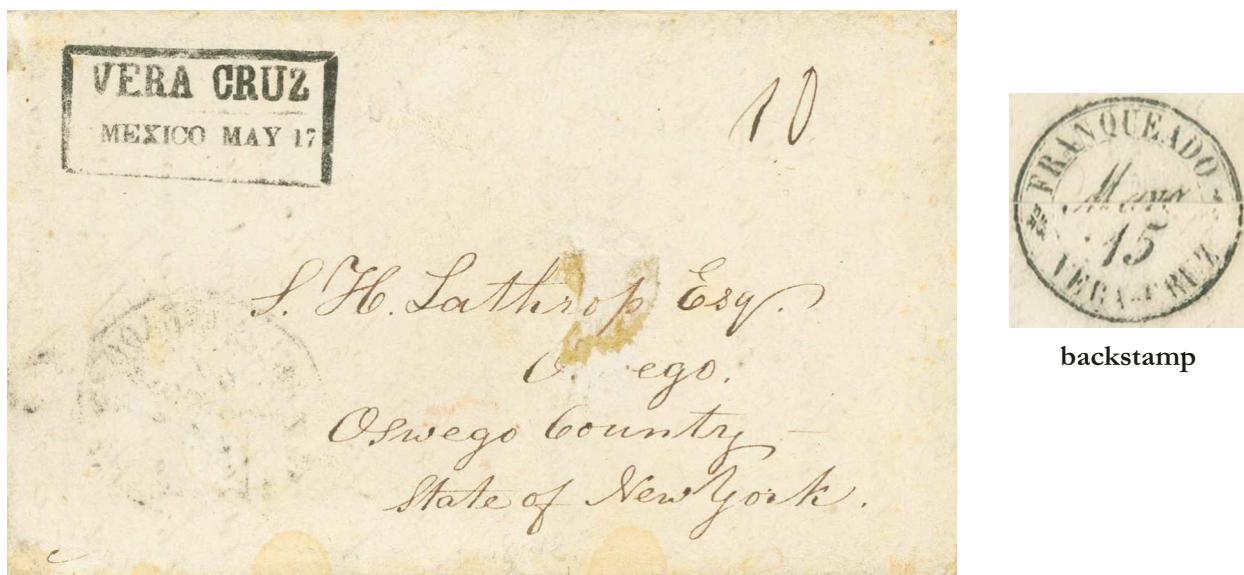


Figure 4-20. February 2, 1848 letter from Hawaii sent via California and Mexico after the end of the war.

The letter from the U.S. Consul Joel Turrill at Hawaii is addressed to Oswego, New York and dated Honolulu February 2, 1848, the same day that the treaty ending the war was signed at the Basilica of Guadalupe at Villa Hidalgo, Mexico. The letter begins "Mr. Jarves leaves in the morning for San Francisco & Mazatlan, & thence across the country for home." Mr. James Jarves, the retiring editor of the newspaper *Polynesian*, departed Honolulu on the schooner *Starling* on February 4, 1848.

After reaching Mazatlan, this letter was carried overland to Vera Cruz where it entered the Mexican mails on May 15. It was then placed into the U.S. military post office at Vera Cruz where it received the "VERA CRUZ MEXICO MAY 17" boxed datestamp and was rated ten cents postage due as a domestic letter. It was then carried by the propeller steamship *McKim* that departed Vera Cruz on May 17 and arrived at New Orleans on May 24, 1848. The *McKim* was not a contract mail steamer but rather a vessel that served as a mail, supply and troop transport steamer.

### Mail via Panama, 1846 to 1849

The map in Figure 4-21 illustrates the transcontinental route via Panama. On the Pacific side, private trading ships carried mail between California and Panama City. A short overland route across the Isthmus

of Panama connected Panama City and Chagres. On the Atlantic side, British steamers operated on a regular schedule from Chagres to Kingston, Jamaica and then to Havana, Cuba. At Havana, mails could be transferred to ships going to New York or New Orleans. In addition, occasional American ships operated directly between Chagres and New Orleans.



Figure 4-13. Map of the via Panama route.

This route, which was faster than those previously discussed, was slow to develop because the Isthmian port cities were not major commercial centers or destinations for American vessels. In 1846, several factors contributed to the rise in importance of the mail route across the Isthmus of Panama. First, the outbreak of the Mexican War in mid-1846 shut down the via Mexico route. A second reason was the improved regular service provided by British steamers on the Atlantic side. Although service between Chagres and Jamaica had been initiated in 1842 by Royal Mail steamers, service was increased after May 1845 to twice-monthly. A third factor was the rise in importance of Panama City as a commercial center. British mail steamers of the Pacific Steam Navigation Company began a regular service on the Pacific slope of South America utilizing the via Panama mail route instead of sending English mails around the Horn. Accordingly, the infrastructure that could support increased mail traffic across Panama, including mail forwarders at Chagres and Panama City, was in place by 1846.

Once the United States commenced mail service by steamship on the Atlantic and Pacific sides in 1849, and facilitated the trans-Isthmus transport of mail, this became the default transcontinental mail route for more than a decade (see Chapter Six).

Still, letter mail sent via Panama before 1849 is uncommon. Figure 4-22 shows an example carried from California, via Panama, in January 1847.

This letter was docketed “Harbor of Monterey California January 27 1847,” and was written by Captain Christopher Tompkins of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Artillery. He wrote to General Roger Jones, Adjutant General of the U.S. Army in Washington, D.C., that he had arrived in Monterey and intended to report to General Kearny at

## 4 - CALIFORNIA MAIIS, 1821-1849

Los Angeles. He also complained about the length of his voyage from New York on the USS *Lexington* – he left on July 14, 1846 and arrived in Monterey six months later. Other passengers on the *Lexington* included Lieutenants Henry Halleck, Edward Ord and William Tecumseh Sherman, all of whom were destined to achieve fame in the Civil War.

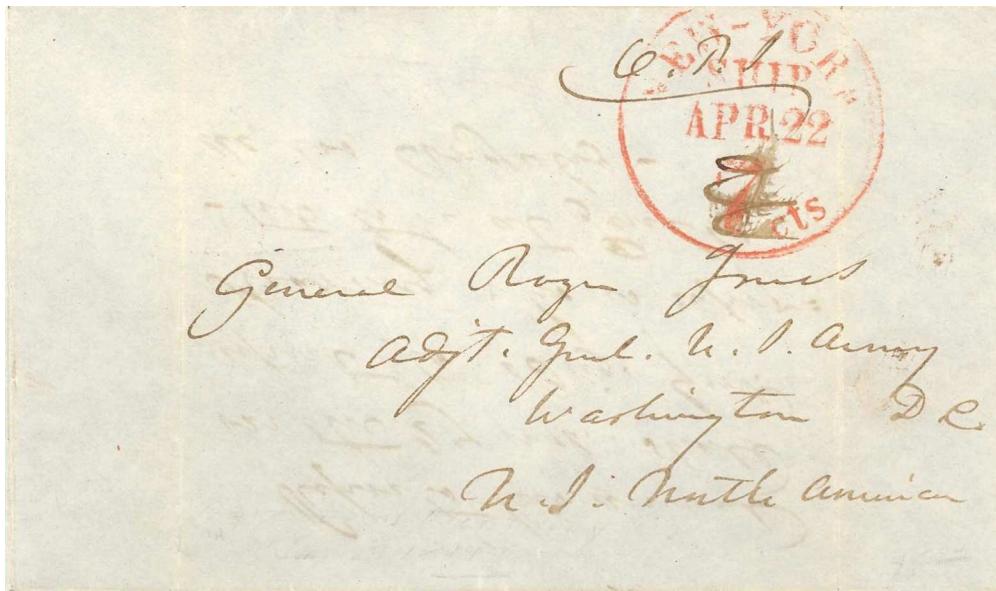


Figure 4-22. January 27, 1847 letter from Monterey sent via Panama and New York.

The letter left Monterey on January 28 aboard the sloop-of-war USS *Dale*, which was taking its captain, Commander McKean, to Panama so that he could return to the United States because of ill health. It arrived at Panama City on March 15, where McKean joined forces with Lt. Gray and Major Emory, who were carrying dispatches to the United States from Commodore Stockton and General Kearny, respectively. The three crossed the Isthmus to Chagres on the east coast, carrying this letter. The HMS *Clyde* then carried them from Chagres (departed March 28) to Jamaica on April 1, where they transferred to the HMS *Dee* (departed Jamaica on April 3 and arrived in Havana on April 10). The ship *Globe* then took the letter to New York, where it arrived on April 21, 1847 and was rated for seven cents postage due including a two cents ship fee. Upon arrival at Washington it was recognized that the recipient was entitled to receive mail free of postage and the seven cents postage due was crossed out.

### Overland Transcontinental Mails

After northern California came under U.S. control in July 1846, military and private overland mail routes connecting California and Missouri soon formed an important communication link. Mail was carried over two primary overland routes. A central route along the California Trail (Figure 4-3) connected San Francisco, via the Humboldt and Platte Rivers, with Missouri. A southern route along the Old Spanish Trail connected southern California with Missouri, via Santa Fe, New Mexico.

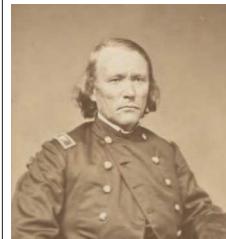
Each of the primary routes had hazards and limitations. Westbound departures on the California Trail from Missouri were only feasible in the April-June timeframe. That window ensured that there was enough grass on the prairies for their horses, and got them over the Sierra Nevada range before the October snows. The route via the Old Spanish Trail from Santa Fe to southern California took two to three

months, but there was another month's travel between Santa Fe and Missouri. This southern route was open throughout the year, but involved a hazardous crossing of the Mojave Desert.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, a regional military mail system which also carried private mail was the first to be established in California. This system linked the two termini of San Francisco and San Diego with the earliest military overland mail routes. Private mails were also carried on these military overland routes.

### Military Courier Overland Mail

Lieutenant Kit Carson, in his capacity as military courier, made five overland crossings with dispatches between 1846 and 1848, as shown in the table below. Carson also carried some private mail, which can be identified by an endorsement to Carson, or by correlation with the dates in the table.



#### Kit Carson's Overland Expeditions, 1842-1848

- 1st Frémont Expedition to South Pass, May-September 1842
- 2nd Frémont Expedition to Oregon & California, July 1843 to July 1844
- 3rd Frémont Expedition to California, August 1845 to December 1845
- Carried dispatches to the East, September to October 1846 - returned to California with General Kearny
- Carried dispatches to the East, February-May 1847
- Carried dispatches to Los Angeles, June-October 1847

#### Depart

Los Angeles September 5, 1846

New Mexico October 6, 1846

Los Angeles February 25, 1847

Fort Leavenworth June 1847

Los Angeles May 4, 1848

#### Route

Mojave Desert

Mojave Desert

Santa Fe and Bent's Fort

Santa Fe and Mojave Desert

Old Spanish Trail to Taos

#### Arrival

New Mexico October 6, 1846

San Diego December 12, 1846

St Louis May 16, 1847

Los Angeles October 1847

St Louis July 25, 1848

Figure 4-23 illustrates a letter carried on Carson's first eastbound trip.

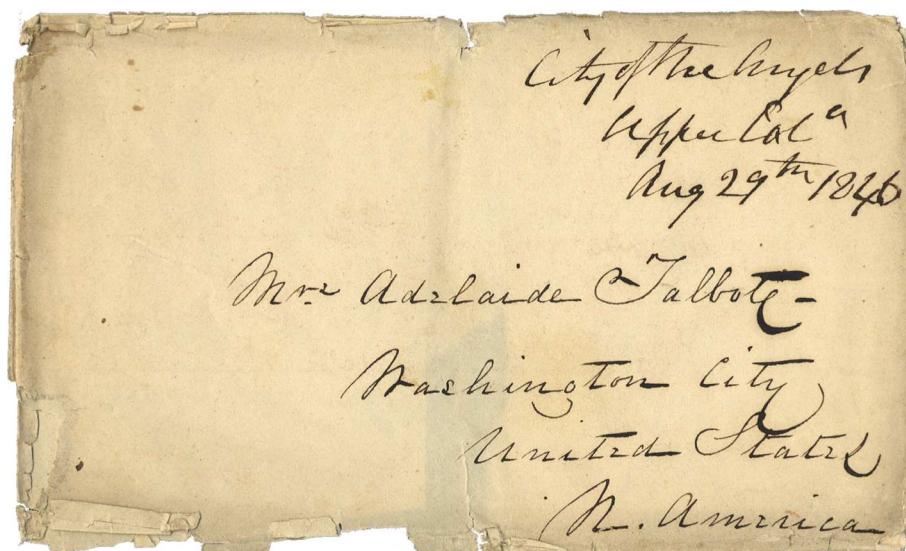


Figure 4-23. August 29, 1846 envelope for letter from Los Angeles carried by Kit Carson and Fitzpatrick to Washington, D.C. (Courtesy Smithsonian National Postal Museum)

## 4 - CALIFORNIA MAILED, 1821-1849

The letter (the actual letter is no longer with the envelope, but a transcription is recorded)<sup>8</sup> was datelined "City of the Angels Upper Cala Aug 29th 1846," and was sent by Sergeant Major Theodore Talbot of Frémont's California Battalion. He wrote:

An Express is on the eve of starting to the United States under Carson and Maxwell. It has been kept perfectly secret and it is said they will be allowed to take no letters. They leave this evg. I have had barely time to scribble these hasty lines. I hope to slip them along.

Carson carried this letter, along with military dispatches, on his first eastbound trip. Along the way, he encountered General Kearny at Valverde, New Mexico on October 6. Kearny was traveling west with a portion of the Army of the West, and ordered Carson to turn around and guide him to California. From Valverde, Carson's dispatches were carried on to Washington, D.C. by Lieutenant William Murphy who passed through Santa Fe on October 9 and reached St. Louis on November 8 (see Figure 2-9).

Theodore Talbot had joined Frémont's 1843 and 1845 expeditions to California, and was mustered into Frémont's California Battalion on July 12, 1846.<sup>9</sup> The Battalion captured Los Angeles on August 13, and Talbot wrote his letter shortly thereafter. Carson left Los Angeles to inform military officials in the East of California's subjugation, although later actions by the Mexicans would re-take Los Angeles from September 1846 to January 1847. Hostilities ceased in California with the January 13, 1847 Treaty of Cahuenga.

On March 11, 1848 The *California Star* announced that a military courier (Carson) would carry personal letters at no charge from Los Angeles to St Louis. One of the private letters carried east by Carson in 1848 is illustrated in Figure 4-24.



Figure 4-24. May 1, 1848 letter from Los Angeles carried by Kit Carson to St Louis.  
(Courtesy Eric Nelson)

This letter was datelined "Pueblo de Los Angeles May 1 1848" and gave a news account of a duel to the New York *Herald*. The writer added a postscript, "This was written in haste as the mail bags close this day for the States." This was Carson's last transcontinental trip with dispatches, and he left on May 4. Following the Old Spanish Trail across the Mojave Desert, he arrived in Taos, New Mexico on June 14. He then travelled up the eastern foothills of the Rockies to the Platte River, and then followed that to St Louis,

where he arrived on July 25. He posted the letter unpaid in St Louis on July 26. Postage due of 10 cents for the greater than 300 miles to New York was collected from the addressee.

General Kearny ended his term as military governor of California on May 31, 1847. He was replaced by Colonel Richard B. Mason, and returned overland to Missouri with a small military contingent, which carried private mail along with military dispatches.

Figure 4-25 shows a private letter carried by Kearny's force. It was datelined "Bark Tasso San Francisco April 30th/47" and was written by John Bull, first officer of the *Tasso* (see Figure 4-16 for an earlier letter

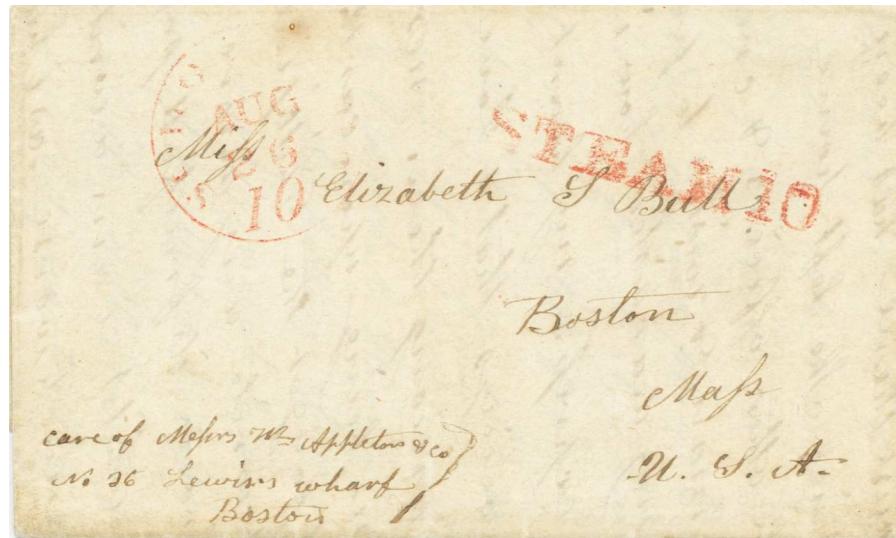


Figure 4-25. April 30, 1847 letter from San Francisco carried by Kearny's force to St Louis.

from Bull). Bull noted in this letter to his sister that, "the U.S. Mail which will convey this to its destination leaves here the 3rd of May." Kearny's California regional mail service was scheduled to leave San Francisco every other Monday, and the second trip left on May 3. This letter was carried by the military courier to Monterey and placed in General Kearny's mailbag for transport to the East. On May 31, Kearny left Monterey for Sutter's Fort, where he awaited the arrival of Colonel Frémont's force, which he had ordered back east with him. The combined force left California on June 15, and arrived in Fort Leavenworth, Missouri on August 22. Kearny left on August 23 aboard the Missouri River steamer *Amelia*, which arrived in St. Louis on August 25. The mail was entrusted to the purser of the steamboat who brought it to the St. Louis post office. It was postmarked on August 26 and stamped "STEAM 10" for 10 cents due for postage from St. Louis to Boston.

Five Kearny letters with these "STEAM 10" markings are known to have survived. In addition, one letter that was carried overland in the military dispatch bag is known. It entered the mails on August 31, 1847 at Fort Leavenworth, Missouri, and is illustrated in Figure 4-26.



Figure 4-26. May 2, 1847 letter from San Francisco carried by Kearny's force to Fort Leavenworth.

This letter was datelined "San Francisco California May 2d 1847" and was written by James H. Maneis, who was a sergeant in Company E of Stevenson's New York 1st Volunteers. Stevenson's force was raised to reinforce the U.S. forces in California, and left New York on September 27, 1846 aboard sailing transports. After a six-month trip around Cape Horn, they arrived in San Francisco in March 1847.

The letter was carried by the same regional military courier to Monterey as the cover in Figure 4-25. Unlike that letter, however, it was placed with the military dispatches and carried to St. Louis in a different bag. That bag was delivered to military authorities at Fort Leavenworth, and this letter was placed in the mails at the fort sometime after the August 23 sailing of the *Amelia* to St. Louis. The August 31 Fort Leavenworth postmark indicates when it was transmitted onward by the regular mails and it was rated for 10 cents postage due to Connecticut.

The U.S. Navy also made provisions for overland communication. The *Californian* reported on September 8, 1847 that letter bags had been sent by the overland route from Philadelphia on the previous February 11. That mail probably arrived in California in July or August 1847. The *Californian*, in its October 13, 1847 issue, also refers to the receipt of an overland naval mail on October 11, which most likely left the East in June or July. No surviving letters carried by these naval couriers are known.

However, when Commodore Stockton stepped down as commander of the California naval forces in January 1847, he did carry a mail overland to the United States on his return trip. A letter carried on this trip is shown in Figure 4-27. It was written on March 24, 1847 by a sailor aboard the U.S.S. *Congress*, which was serving as Stockton's flagship, while in the harbor of San Diego. Per the letter, the sailor intended to send the letter via the U.S.S. *Savannah*, "which leaves this port to Day." However, as the U.S.S. *Savannah* was delayed, and did not leave for New York until September 8, this letter was instead carried with Commodore Stockton on his overland trip to the East.

Stockton, in a party of 49 men, left Monterey on June 20 and, after a four-month journey via Fort Hall and Fort Laramie, reached St. Joseph on October 26, 1847. Four days later this letter was postmarked at the St. Joseph post office and rated 10 cents due for the postage to Philadelphia.



Figure 4-27. March 24 1847 letter from a sailor at San Diego carried by Commodore Stockton's party overland to St Joseph.

## Gold Shipments from California

A major historical event in California was the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill (near Sacramento) on January 24, 1848. By early May 1848, Sam Brannan was striding through the streets of San Francisco proclaiming the discovery of gold, which triggered a mass exodus to the American River mines. The military governor of California, Colonel Richard B. Mason, investigated these claims and sent several couriers back East to inform the U.S. government. One such courier, B. Chouteau, was sent overland with gold samples from Monterey on May 19, 1848. He also carried private mail, an example of which is shown in Figure 4-28.



**Samuel Brannan (center) and the Gold Rush, 1846-1851 (photograph with Thomas Larkin and William Howard)**

- Brought 238 Mormons to California on the *Brooklyn*, July 31, 1846
- Started the *California Star* in San Francisco, January 7, 1847
- Travelled to meet with Brigham Young at Green River, WY, June 1847
- Proclaimed discovery of gold in San Francisco, May 12, 1848
- Became wealthy supplying gold rush from store at Sutter's Mill
- Disowned by Mormon church because of his vigilante committee

This letter was written on May 18, 1848 by Mrs. Persis Goodale Taylor, who had just arrived at Monterey, California after a trip around Cape Horn. She was on her way to join her missionary family in Hawaii, and was writing to her sister to describe her journey. She endorsed the letter "overland" and gave it to Colonel Mason to be carried back East by Chouteau. Shortly after May 19, Chouteau left Monterey for Los Angeles, a trip of about three weeks. He left southern California on July 4 with the letter and arrived at

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Santa Fe on August 15, where he apparently stopped for while before continuing up the Santa Fe Trail to Missouri. Chouteau reached St Louis in early October, and posted the letter unpaid on October 11. It was rated for postage due of 10 cents for the greater than 300 miles to Massachusetts.



Figure 4-28. May 18, 1848 letter from Monterey carried by Chouteau overland to St Louis.

By the end of 1848 gold fever was epidemic in the East as well as in California (Figure 4-29). Following the initial reports and samples of gold that had been carried overland, gold was beginning to flow east from California in quantity. Routes by sea around the Horn, and by sea and via Mexico were used for gold



Figure 4-29. View of San Francisco in 1848 after Bayard Taylor.

shipments in 1848. By mid-1849 most California gold, in common with the letter-mail, was carried by sea and across Panama.

A December 11, 1848 report<sup>10</sup> from R.M. Patterson, Director of the United States Mint at Philadelphia, to the Secretary of Treasury reported the first deposit of California gold at the mint. It was deposited by David Carter, who had arrived via Panama, and was assayed at \$36,492, "besides a few ounces preserved in the native state for the Secretary of War, at his request."

The bark *Laura Ann* departed San Francisco with \$10,000 in gold bound for the U.S. on December 10, 1848. The Alexandria, Virginia *Gazette* of December 15, 1849 reported the arrival at New York of Robert Atherton, a miner who was onboard the *Laura Ann* when she departed San Francisco. From Mazatlan he then traveled overland via Guadalajara, Mexico City, and Vera Cruz. Although Atherton's published reports may have been exaggerated, he claimed to have bills of lading in the amount of \$200,000 for gold shipped on "English account" which he wished to insure.

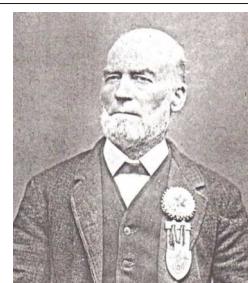
The USS *Lexington* also departed San Francisco in December 1848. At her stop in Valparaiso, she off-loaded \$100,000 of gold which was carried north to Panama, overland to Chagres, and eventually arrived in New York aboard the *Crescent City* on June 23, 1849. The *Crescent City* also carried a further \$390,000 in California gold that had been received at Chagres during the first three months of 1849. After the *Lexington*'s stop in Valparaiso, she proceeded around the Horn carrying her additional cargo of \$270,000 in California gold bullion and arrived at New York on June 11, 1849.

To put this quantity of gold in perspective, the total gold cargo of \$370,000 carried by the *Lexington* was 1,676 troy pounds (26,816 troy ounces). Gold was valued at approximately \$13.80 per troy ounce in 1849. The value of the shipment equates at \$1,250 per troy ounce to \$33,520,000.

## Private Newspaper Overland Mails to Missouri, 1848

Samuel Brannan and Orrin Smith, leaders of a group of 238 Mormons from Illinois, arrived in San Francisco (called Yerba Buena until January 1847) aboard the ship *Brooklyn* on July 31, 1846. They brought with them a portable Franklin printing press, which they soon put to use publishing San Francisco's first English language newspaper, the *California Star*. The first issue appeared on January 9, 1847, but publication was interrupted on June 14, 1848 when the entire staff departed for the mines.

In January 1848, San Francisco merchants met to determine what they could do to revitalize their stagnant economy. They concluded that a promotional piece about the virtues of San Francisco might entice more emigrants from the United States. Accordingly, Brannan agreed to publish two special editions of his paper for this purpose, on April 1 and June 1, and to deliver them overland to the East. He also decided to carry private letters on those two trips.



**Nathan Hawk and the  
Mormon Battalion,  
1846-1848**

- Mustered into Kearny's Army of the West, July 16, 1846
- Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe, September-October 1846
- To California via Mojave desert, October-December 1846
- Arrived in San Diego, January 29, 1847
- Mustered out in Los Angeles, July 16, 1847
- Led *California Star* Express to Missouri, April-July 1848
- Returned overland to California with his family, late-April to September 1849

## 4 - CALIFORNIA MAIIS, 1821-1849

In its January 15, 1848 edition, the *California Star* announced that it was sponsoring an express to Independence, Missouri, which would leave San Francisco on April 1, 1848. It was then scheduled to depart from Brannan's store at New Helvetia (today's Sacramento) on April 15 and to arrive in Missouri 60 days later. Private letters were to be carried to Missouri for a fee of 50 cents each. Brannan hired ten men to carry the special newspaper edition and the mail to Missouri. Six of the ten were discharged soldiers from the Mormon Battalion, as was the leader of the party, Nathan Hawk.<sup>11</sup> After leaving Sacramento on April 15, they crossed the Sierra Nevada and reached Salt Lake City on July 9. The earliest newspaper reports of their arrival in Independence, Missouri were from St. Louis on August 8, 1848. Accordingly, letters carried by this express would have California datelines of January to March 1848, and Missouri postmarks of July 1848, although none are known to have survived.

The *Californian* newspaper moved from Monterey to San Francisco on May 22, 1847 to compete with the *California Star*. On April 19, 1848, it also announced an overland express mail:

Our overland Mail for the United States will positively close on Thursday the 27<sup>th</sup> day of April, (present month.) Our next paper will be the last that can be sent by this mail – It will contain much valuable information concerning California. Postage on letters 50 cents – on papers 12½.

This was clearly a competitive response to the April 1 *California Star* letter express. Then, on May 3, the *Californian* reported that, “Our overland mail for the U.S. was closed at this Office on Thursday last, and delivered to the courier, who immediately left for Sacramento on his way across the mountains.” Notwithstanding that report, no letters carried by the *Californian*’s express are known.



Figure 4-30. Advertisement for an Express to the United States in the May 20, 1848 *California Star*.

On May 20, 1848 the *California Star* announced (Figure 4-30) its second express, scheduled to depart on June 20. Per the advertisement, postage to Independence, Missouri remained at 50 cents per letter, and newspapers were to be carried for 12½ cents each. However, a longer article in the June 10 issue of the *California Star* listed different prices, and updated readers on the status of the April 15, 1848 express.

ANOTHER U.S. MAIL – We are able to announce to the public that on the 25<sup>th</sup> of this month, we will despatch from the valley of the Sacramento, another Mail, directly through to Independence, Mo. It will close at this office on the 12<sup>th</sup>, (Monday next) but will remain at the store of Messrs. C.C. Smith and Co., New Helvetia, for the reception of letters and newspapers until the day of departure. Postage on letters \$1.00, and on papers 25 cents.

This office advertised an Express for the United States, to take its departure on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of April last. Precisely, to a day, it took the great road leading over that immense obstacle, that insurmountable barrier, the Snowy Mountains, performed the unparalleled feat of crossing through “melting snows,” and was safely speeding onward, at last accounts. We say this much, not only that apprehensions on the part of the interested may be allayed, but that gratuitous prophesiers of ill may be comforted, if comfort there can be derived from their own discomfiture.

The Express of the 25<sup>th</sup> inst. will positively leave on that day.

Brannan's second special edition was never published because his entire publication staff left for the gold mines after the June 10, 1848 issue. It is also unlikely that the second overland express was sent.

### Other Private Mails, 1848

Elbert P. Jones, who served as the first editor of the *California Star*, also announced an express mail to the United States on April 25, 1848, and placed an advertisement for it in the May 6 edition of the *California Star*.

THE MAIL! THE EASTERN MAIL! THE Undersigned, having made arrangements to transmit a private Express Mail across the mountains, gives notice that separate mail bags will be made up for Fort Hall, Salt Lake settlement, Fort Bridger, Fort Laramie, Santa Fe, and all parts of the United States.

The mail will be closed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May. Postage will be the same as on similar expresses.  
E.P. JONES

There are no known covers which prove that Jones's express successfully carried mail to the East.

An example of attempted westbound private mail carriage in 1848 is shown in Figure 4-31. The letter, addressed to Capt. Joseph Aram, was posted unpaid in Granville, Ohio on August 28, 1848 and directed to the post office at Independence, Missouri with instructions to "forward this by the first opportunity" to Monterey, California. Postage due of 10 cents was assessed at Granville for the greater than 300 miles to Independence.

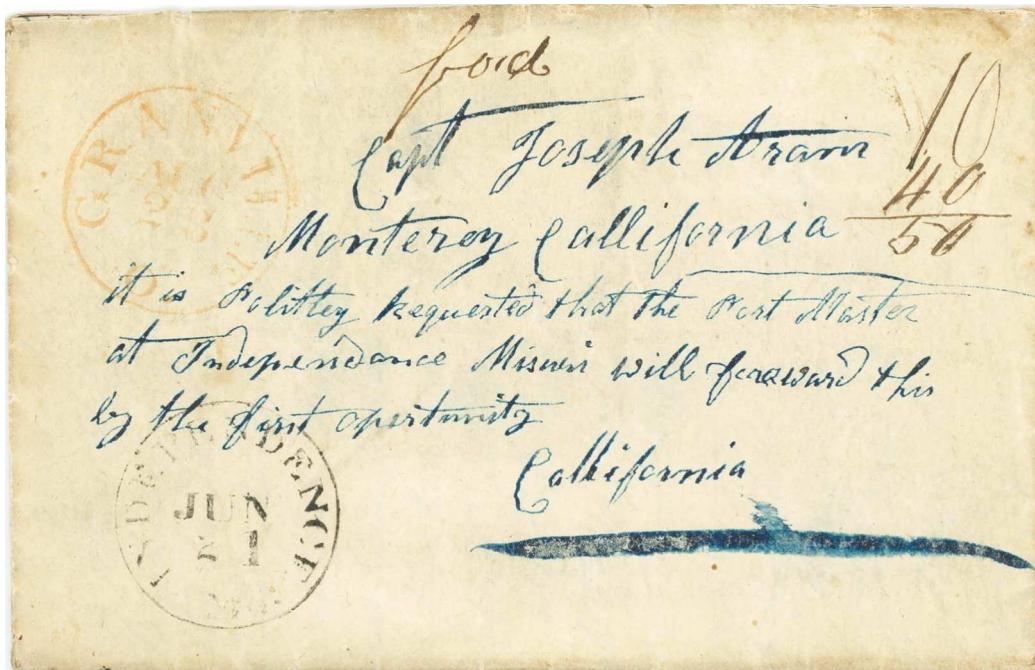


Figure 4-31. Letter posted August 28, 1848 in Ohio, and sent to Independence, Missouri for forwarding to California. It was sent via Panama in 1849.

The letter arrived in Independence after the 1848 emigration was over, so it was held there until June 21, 1849 when the post office directed that it should be routed via New York and Panama to California on the

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recently established contract mail route. The Independence post office assessed 40 cents additional postage due for forwarding to California, which meant that a total of 50 cents was due from the recipient. The letter was too late to connect with the June 28 USMSC sailing from New York, so it was carried by USMSC steamship *Falcon*, which left on August 27 (see Appendix C) and arrived Chagres on September 18, 1849. After a trip across the isthmus, it left Panama City on October 1 aboard the PMSS *Unicorn*, which arrived in San Francisco on October 31, 1849, fully 14 months after the letter was written.

Captain Joseph Aram, the addressee, had emigrated to California in 1846 with the Russell - Boggs party. They left Independence on May 5, 1846 along with the Donner party, but parted ways in what is now Wyoming. The Donner party took the Hastings cut-off trail, and the Russell - Boggs party took the traditional Humboldt/Truckee River route to Sutter's Fort. They arrived there on October 10, and the Donner party was stranded in the Sierra Nevadas with tragic results.

The letter mostly gives personal news, but also refers to the receipt of an eastbound letter, "I received yours dated March 19, 1848 Monterey. Suppose it came by Lieutenant Carson favor to St Louis." That letter was apparently carried in the same Carson mail as the letter in Figure 4-24.

### Endnotes

1. Weber, *The Mexican Frontier*, p. 180.
2. Unruh, *The Plains Across*, pp. 119-120.
3. Bancroft, *History of California Vol. IV*, p. 588.
4. Frajola and Risvold, "Kearny's California Mail Route," *Chronicle* 225, pp. 57-58.
5. 31st. Congress, House of Reps., Ex. Doc. No. 18, p. 614.
6. Bancroft, *History of California, Volume XXI*, p. 385.
7. Underhill, *From Cowhides to Golden Fleece*, p. 90.
8. R.V. Hine and S. Lottinville, *Soldier in the West*
9. Papp, "Fremont's Lieutenant in California, 1846-1850," *Western Express*, March 1996, pages 14.
10. *Niles National Register*, Volume 74, page 389 (December 20, 1848 issue)
11. Ricketts, "The California Star Express," *Sacramento Historical Society Golden Notes*, Spring 1982