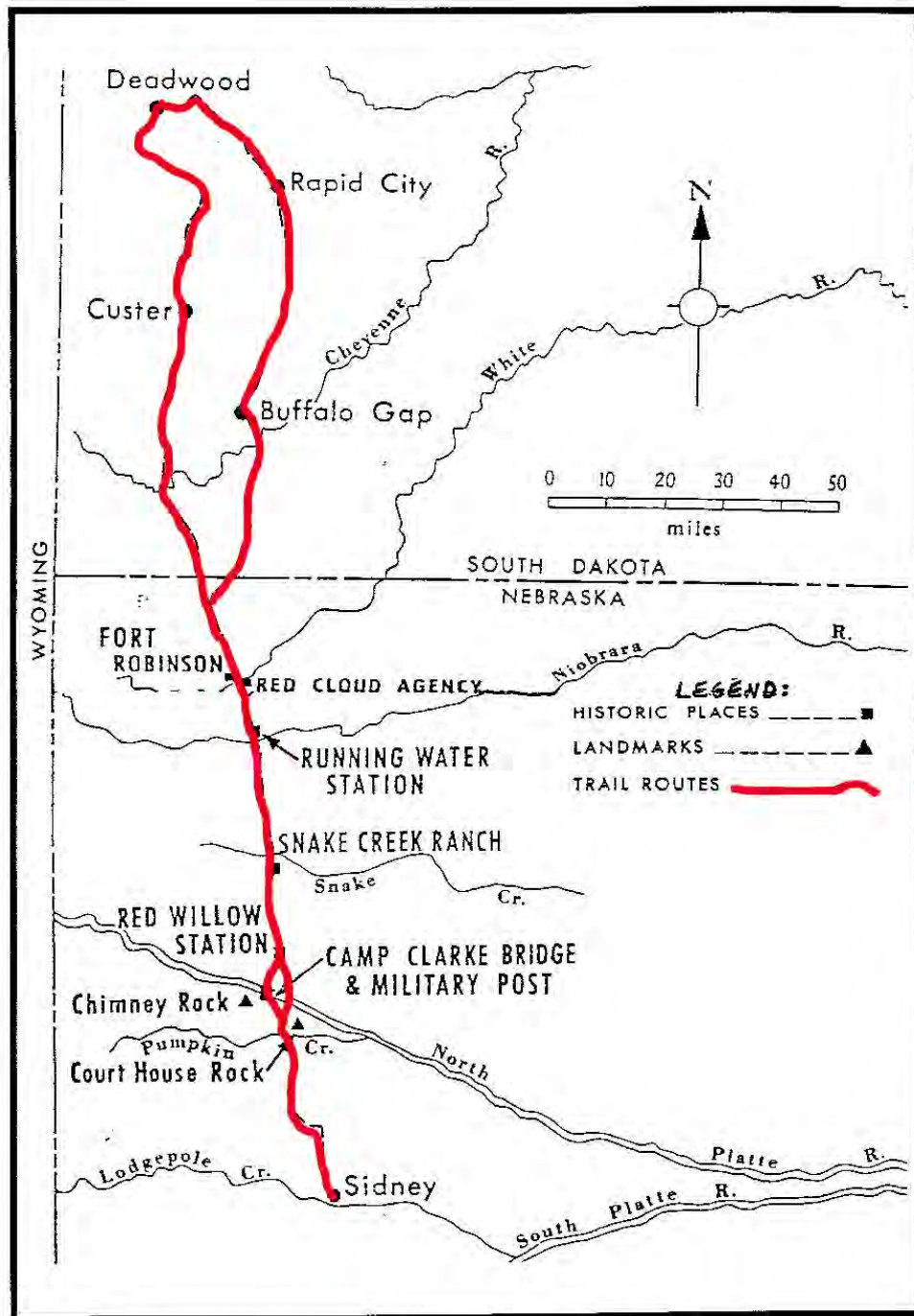


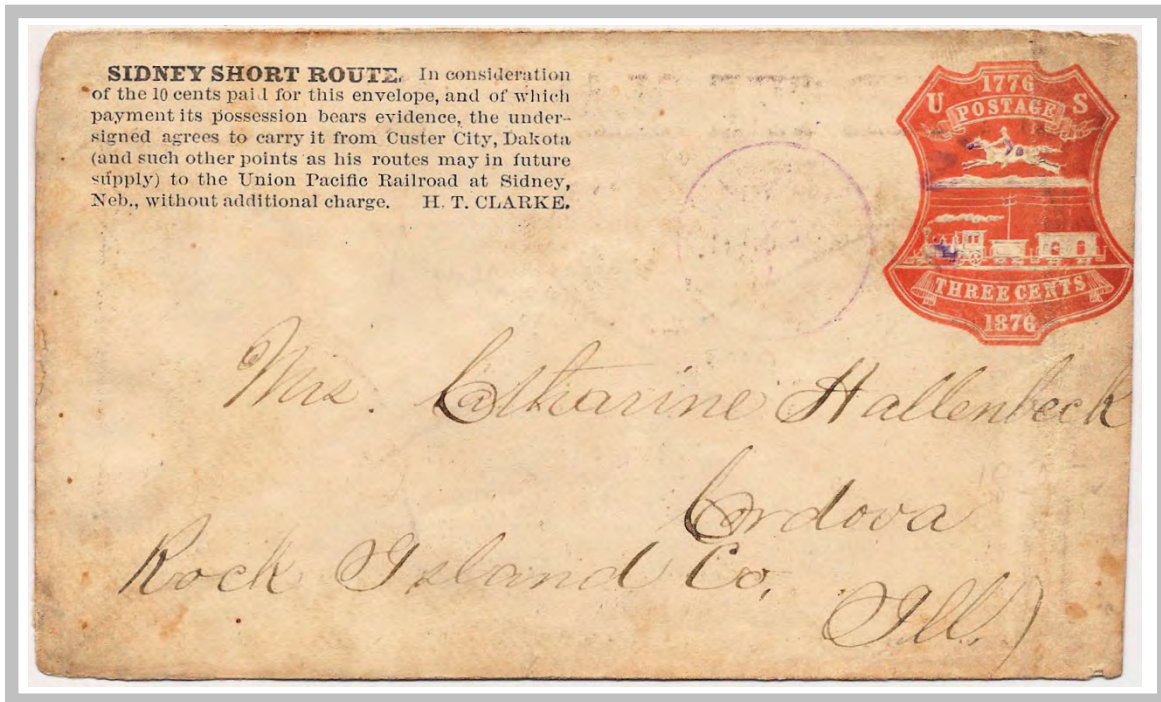


Henry Tefft Clarke established his express into the Black Hills of South Dakota in the spring of 1876 to provide mail service to the various mining camps, as the US Post Office Department had refused service into the area it still considered “Indian country”. Clarke raised \$3000 from merchants and residents of Sidney, Nebraska to build a bridge over the North Platte River, some 40 miles north of Sidney, thereby establishing the “Sidney Short Route” on May 10, 1876 when the bridge was completed.

Clarke initially operated a Pony Express to and from the Black Hills in 1876, but discontinued this service due to the excessive cost. He then had envelopes franked with information about his route, which he sold at the Black Hills mining camps, Omaha, Chicago and some railroad ticket offices. Clarke contracted with Marsh & Stephenson to carry the mails for the “Centennial Express”, which operated into 1877 despite continuing poor financial performance.



Map showing the route of Clarke's Centennial Express over the Sidney to Black Hills trail



Carried by **Clarke's Centennial Express (Persson Type 1 frank)** from the Black Hills to Sidney, Neb, where it entered the mails with their Aug 6 (1876 or 1877) postmark for delivery to Cordova, Illinois.

HO! FOR THE BLACK HILLS!

THE

**New 61 Span Truss Bridge over the Platte River,
40 MILES NORTH OF SIDNEY,**

IS NOW OPEN FOR TRAVEL, AND IS

Guarded by the United States Troops.

ONLY 167 MILES

From the Union Pacific Railroad to Custer City.

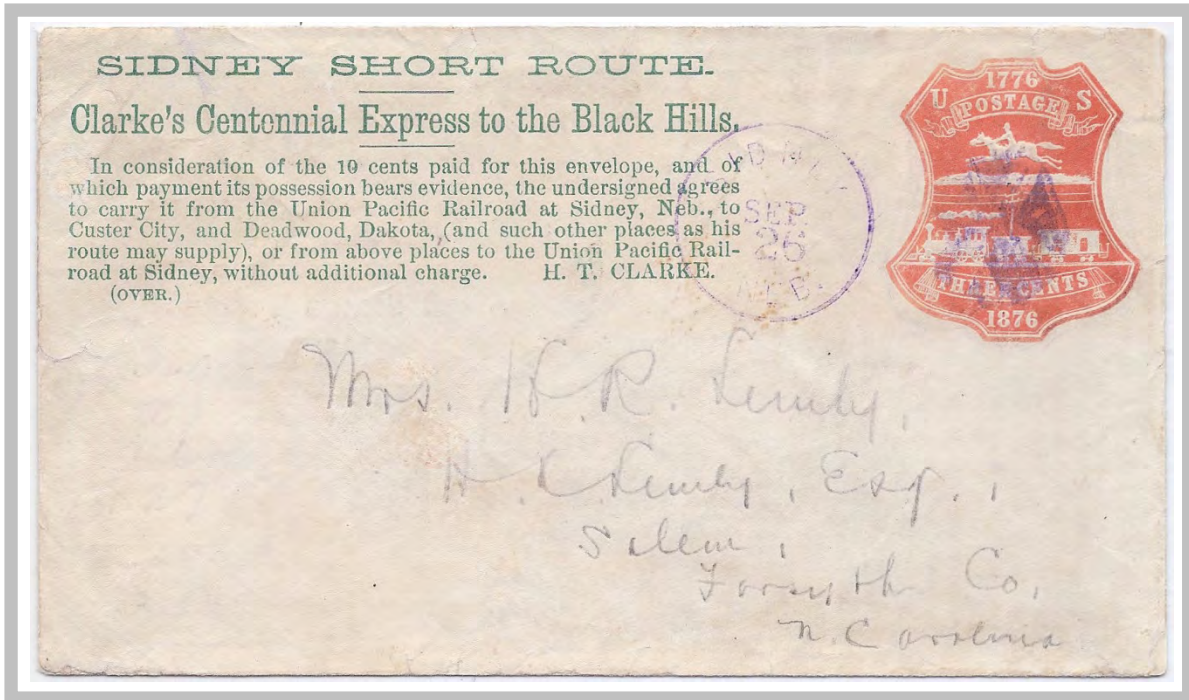
Wood and Water in Abundance, and the Finest Roads in the World by this Route. All Mail sent in care of H. T. CLARKE, SIDNEY AND CAMP CLARKE, PLATTE RIVER BRIDGE, will be forwarded as directed. Sidney is now a good out-fitting point. Large supply of Grain, Groceries, Hardware and Produce always on hand. Hotel accommodations good.

TOTAL DISTANCE FROM SIDNEY TO CUSTER CITY **167 MILES.** This distance is by the road now traveled between the two Agencies. Dear's Sidney and Black Hills Stage Line leaves this route at Snake River, running through to Red Cloud Indian Agency in **17** hours, and to Custer City in **36** hours. The distance by this route is **182** miles.

Our forwarding houses can furnish transportation for **250.000** Pounds at a shipment. FREIGHT CHARGES, Sidney to Custer City, range from **3** to **5** cents per pound. Freight shipped care H. T. Clarke, Sidney, Neb., will be shipped at lowest rates.

Passenger Rates—Omaha to Custer City, 1st class \$45.00, 2d class \$35.00, 3d class \$25.00

H. T. CLARKE, FORWARDING AND COMMISSION MERCHANT, wholesale dealer in Grain, Groceries, Provisions, Wagons, Mowers and out-fitting Goods, SIDNEY, NEBRASKA. All orders filled and forwarded at the lowest rates of freight. Owing to the difficulty of getting mail through toward from the Black Hills, Mr. Clarke has had printed and placed on sale at Sidney and Points in the Hills, Government Envelopes, similar to the old Pony Express, in which all mail must be enclosed to be forwarded by Clarke's Letter Express to Custer City, Deadwood and other points. Price 10cts.



Carried by **Clarke's Centennial Express (Persson Type 2 frank)** from the Black Hills to Sidney, Neb, where it entered the mails with their Sep 26 (1876 or 1877) postmark for delivery to Salem, N. Carolina.

SIDNEY SHORT ROUTE
TO
THE BLACK HILLS.

**The New 61 Span Truss Bridge over the Platte River,
40 Miles North of Sidney,**

IS NOW OPEN FOR TRAVEL, AND, WITH THE ROAD, IS
Guarded by the United States Troops.

ONLY 167 MILES TO CUSTER CITY
FROM THE UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD.

Wood and Water in abundance, and the Finest Roads in the World by this Route. All Mail sent in care of **H. T. CLARKE, Sidney, and Camp Clarke, Platte River Bridge**, will be forwarded as directed. Sidney is now a good out-fitting point. Large supply of Grain, Groceries, Hardware, and Produce always on hand. Hotel accommodations good.

TOTAL DISTANCE FROM SIDNEY TO CUSTER CITY 167 MILES. This distance is by the road now traveled between the two Agencies. Dear's Sidney and Black Hills Stage Line leaves this route and Snake River, running through to Red Cloud Indian Agency in 17 hours, and to Custer City in 36 hours. The distance by this route is 182 miles.

Our forwarding houses can furnish transportation for **250 000 POUNDS** at a shipment. **FREIGHT CHARGES**, Sidney to Custer City, range from 3 to 5 cents per pound. Freight shipped care H. T. Clarke, Sidney, Neb., will be shipped at lowest rates.

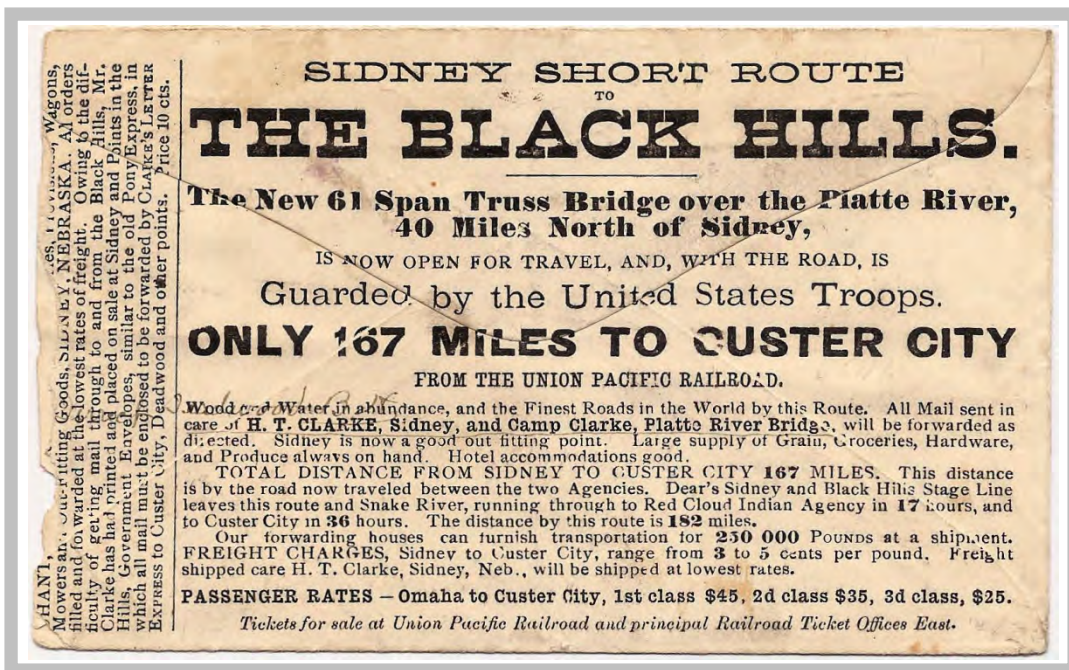
PASSENGER RATES - Omaha to Custer City, 1st class \$45, 2d class \$35, 3d class, \$25.

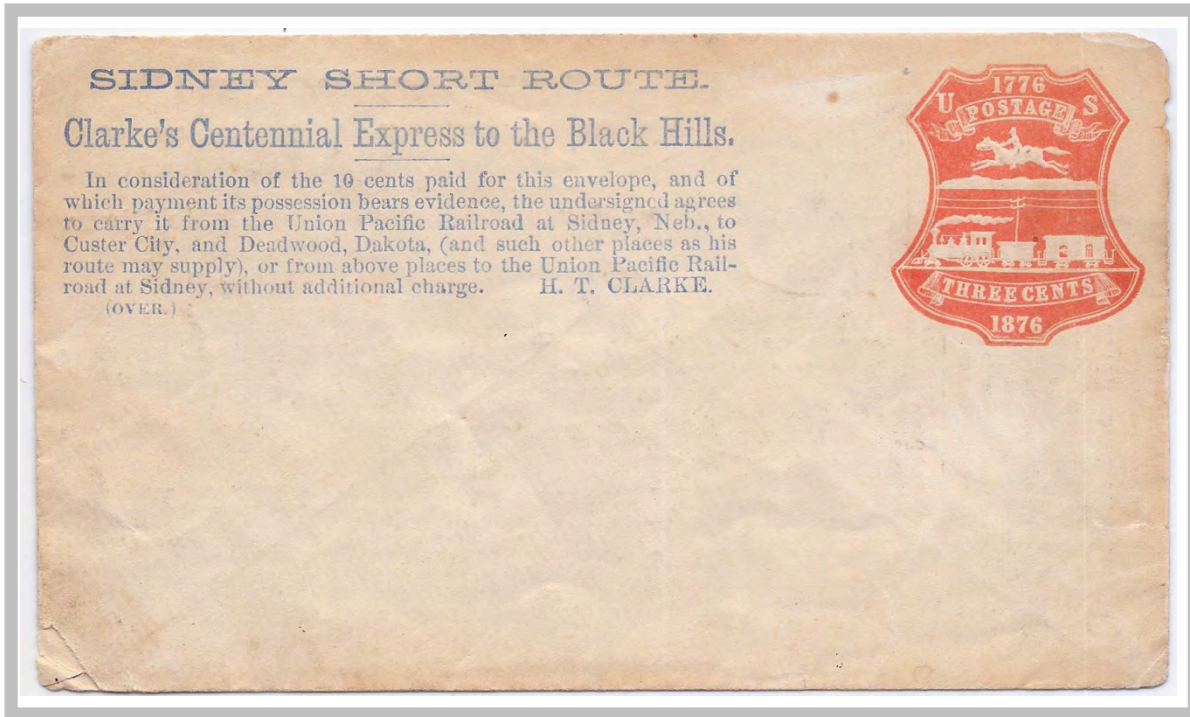
Tickets for sale at Union Pacific Railroad and principal Railroad Ticket Offices East.

H. T. CLARKE, FORWARDING AND COMMISSION MERCHANT, wholesale dealer in Grain, Groceries, Provisions, Wagons, Mowers and Out-Fitting Goods, SIDNEY, NEBRASKA. All orders filled and forwarded at the lowest rates of freight. Owing to the difficulty of getting mail through to and from the Black Hills, Mr. Clarke has had printed and placed on sale at Sidney and points in the Hills, Government Envelopes, similar to the old Pony Express, in which all mail must be enclosed to be forwarded by CLARKE'S LETTER EXPRESS to Custer City, Deadwood and other points. Price 10 cts.

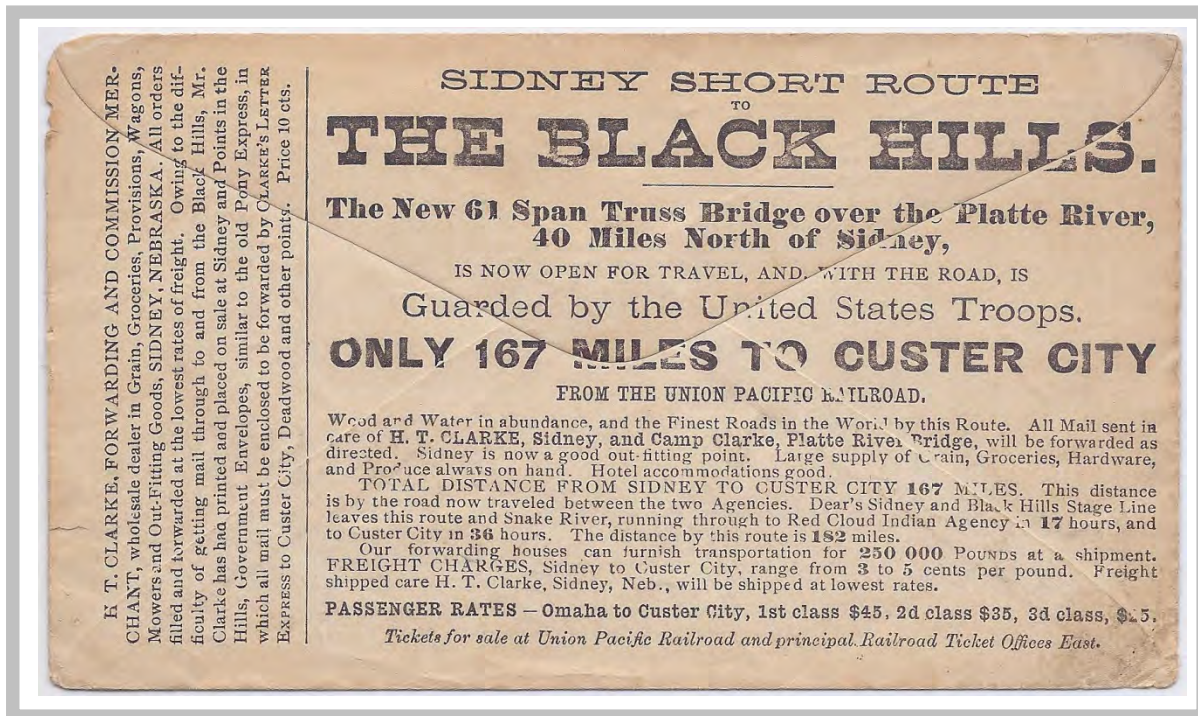


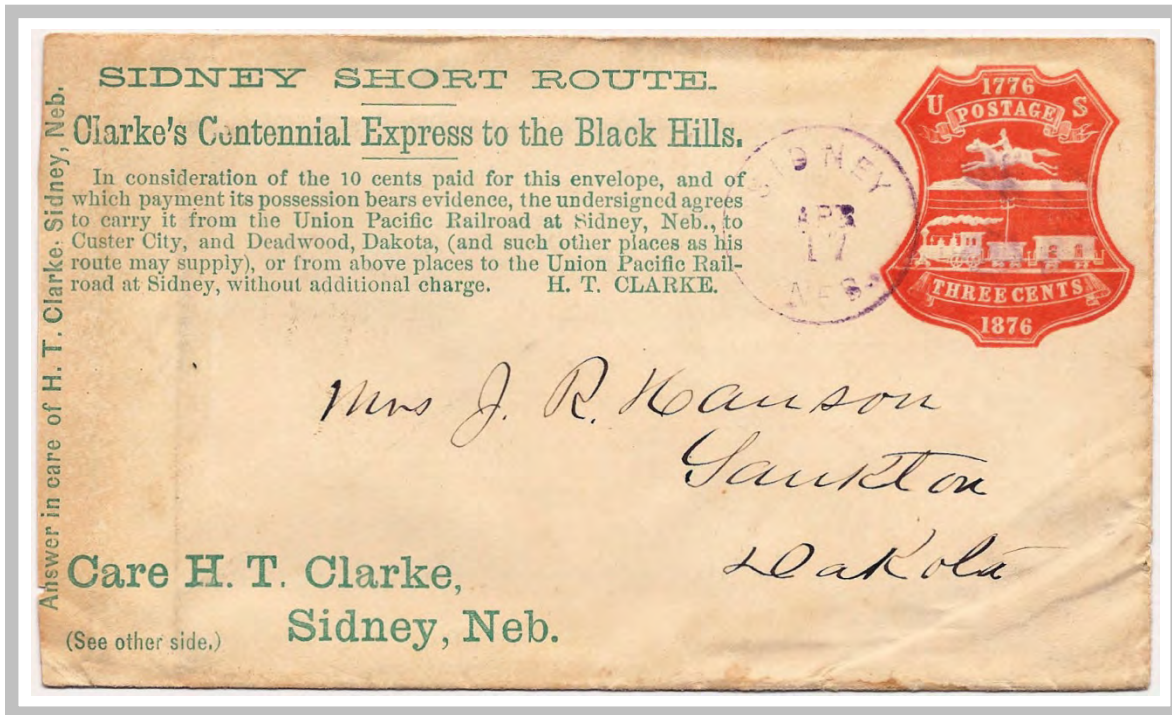
Carried by **Clarke's Centennial Express (Persson Type 2a frank)** from the Black Hills to Sidney, Neb, where it entered the mails with their Aug 31 (1876 or 1877) postmark for delivery to Sing Sing, New York.



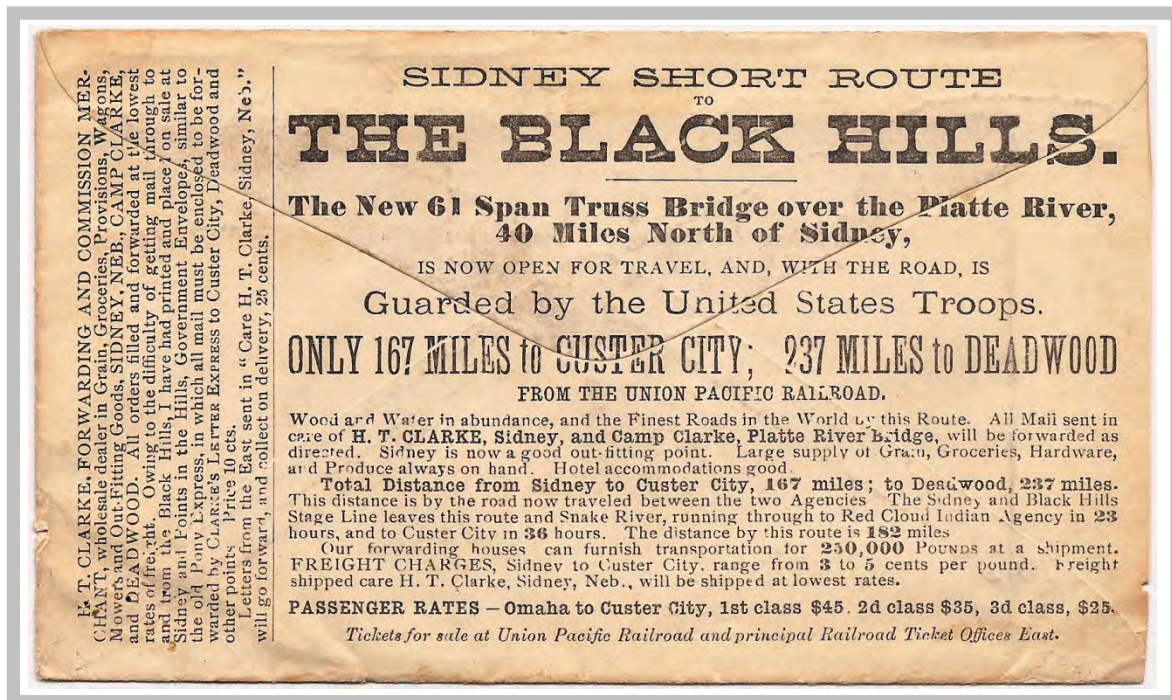


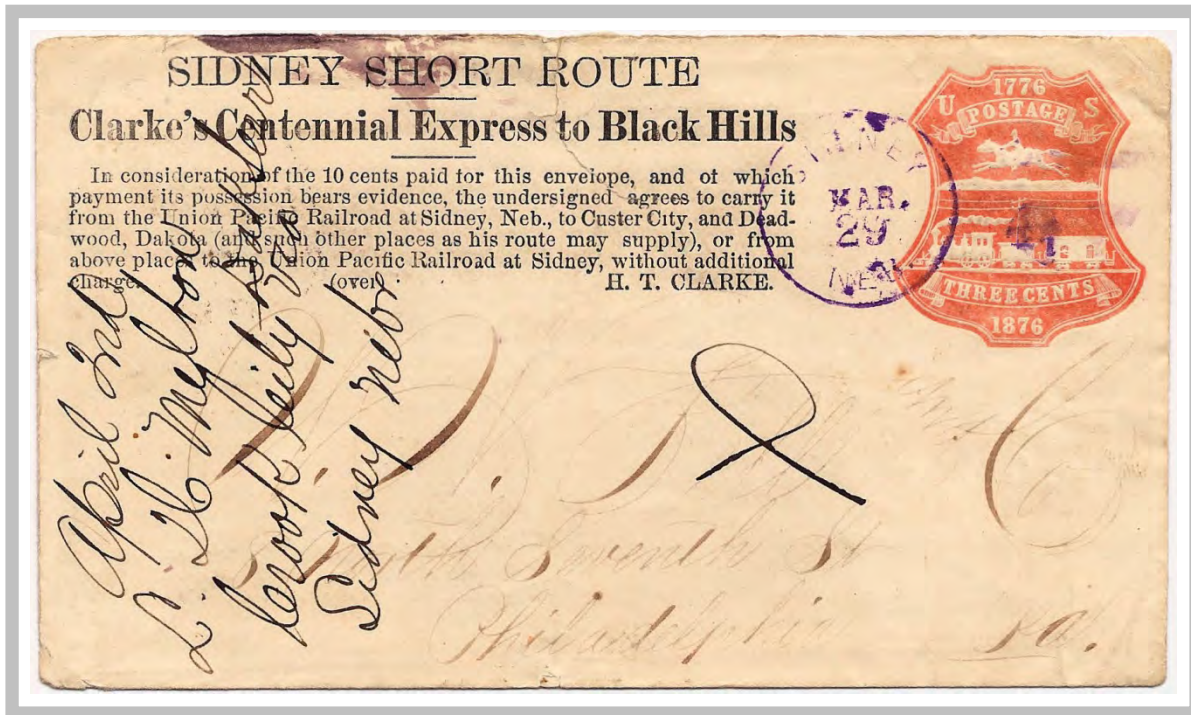
Unused **Clarke's Centennial Express (Persson Type 3 frank)** . *No used examples of this type frank have yet been reported.*





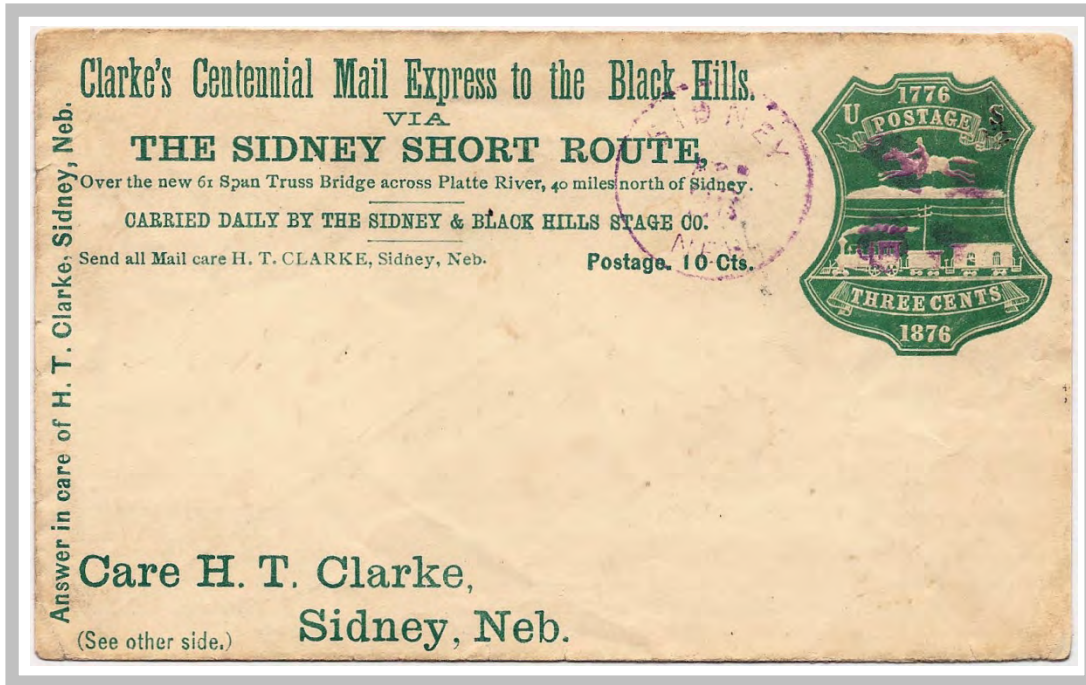
Carried by **Clarke's Centennial Express (Persson Type 4 frank)** from the Black Hills to Sidney, Neb, where it entered the mails with their Apr 17 (likely 1877) postmark for delivery to Yankton, Dakota.





Carried by **Clarke's Centennial Express (Persson Type 5 frank)** from the Black Hills to Sidney, Neb, where it entered the mails with their Mar 29 (likely 1877) postmark for delivery to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Docketing at left indicates the sender was at Crook City.





Clarke's Centennial Mail Express to the Black Hills.
VIA
THE SIDNEY SHORT ROUTE,
Over the new 61 Span Truss Bridge across Platte River, 40 miles north of Sidney.
CARRIED DAILY BY THE SIDNEY & BLACK HILLS STAGE CO.
Send all Mail care H. T. CLARKE, Sidney, Neb. Postage. 10 Cts.

Answer in care of H. T. Clarke, Sidney, Neb.

Care H. T. Clarke,
Sidney, Neb.
(See other side.)

Carried by **Clarke's Centennial Express (Persson Type 6 frank)** from the Black Hills to Sidney, Neb, where it entered the mails with their Apr 23 (likely 1877) postmark. Address removed, so final destination is unknown.

SIDNEY SHORT ROUTE TO THE BLACK HILLS.

The New 61 Span Truss Bridge over the Platte River, 40 Miles North of Sidney,
IS NOW OPEN FOR TRAVEL, AND, WITH THE ROAD,
Guarded by the United States Troops.

ONLY 167 MILES to CUSTER CITY; 237 MILES to DEADWOOD
FROM THE UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD.

Wood and Water in abundance, and the Finest Roads in the World by this Route. All Mail for the Black Hills sent in care of **H. T. CLARKE, Sidney**, will be forwarded as directed. Sidney is the best out-fitting point. Large supply of Grain, Groceries, Hardware, and Produce always on hand. Hotel accommodations good.

Total Distance from Sidney to Custer City, 167 miles; to Deadwood, 237 miles. The Sidney and Black Hills Stage Line makes Tri weekly trips between Sidney and Deadwood, running through from the former place to Red Cloud Indian Agency in 24 hours, Custer City in 36 hours, and Deadwood in 48 hours.

Our forwarding houses can furnish transportation for 250,000 Pounds at a moment. FREIGHT CHARGES, Sidney to Custer City, Deadwood and other points range from 3 to 6 cents per pound.

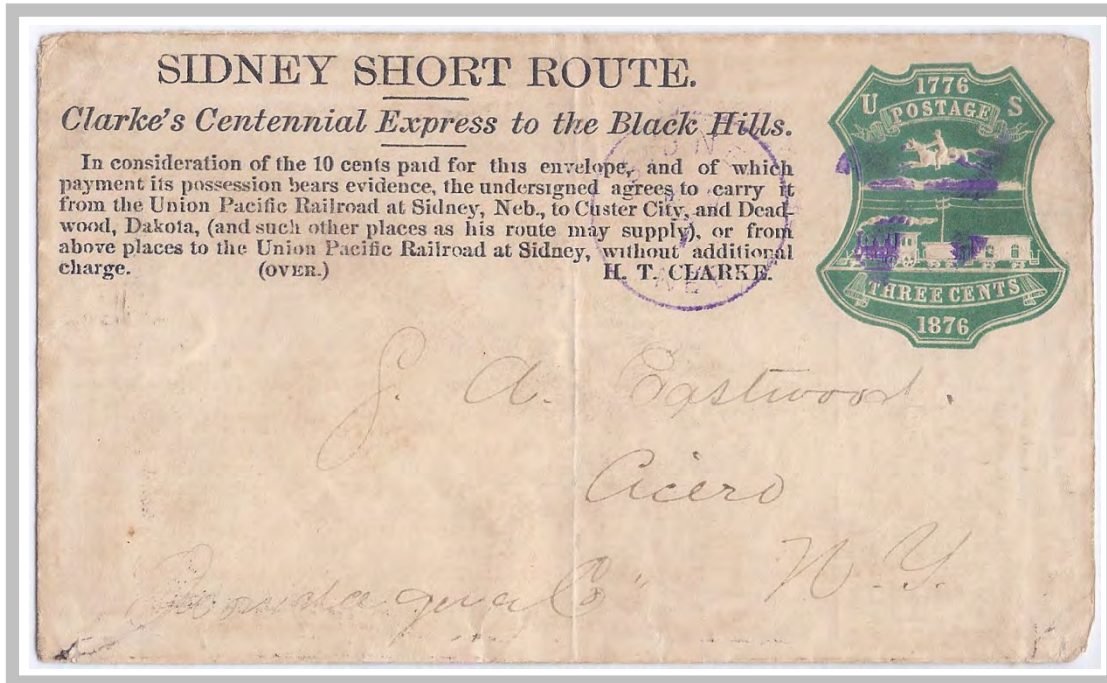
PASSENGER RATES. 39-13LEEC

Sidney to Custer City, first class, \$20, 2d class, \$15, Rapid City, \$25 and \$17, Deadwood, \$30 & \$20. 3d class, \$12. Tickets for sale at Union Pacific Railroad and principal Railroad Ticket Offices East.

CLARKE'S NEW 61 SPAN TRUSS BRIDGE OVER THE PLATTE RIVER.

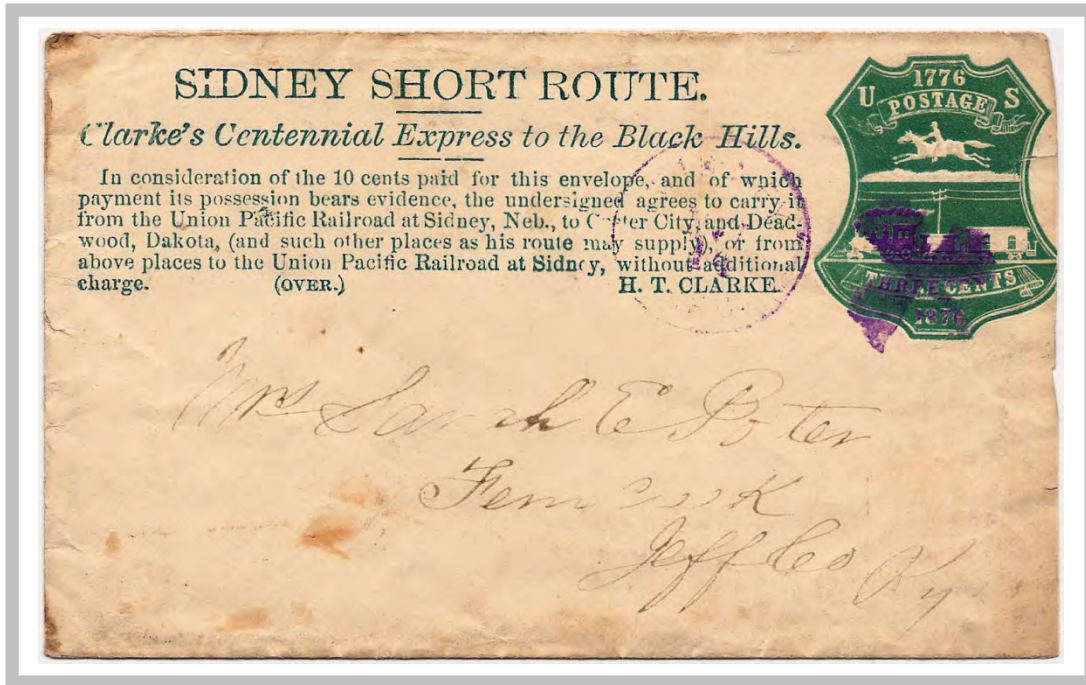
RATES OF TOLL.

Two-horse Team, Wagon and Driver	2 00
Four " " " " " " " "	3 00
Large stock of Grain, Provisions, and Outfitting Goods, to be had at bridge, where there are also a Corral, Hotel and Blacksmith Shop.	

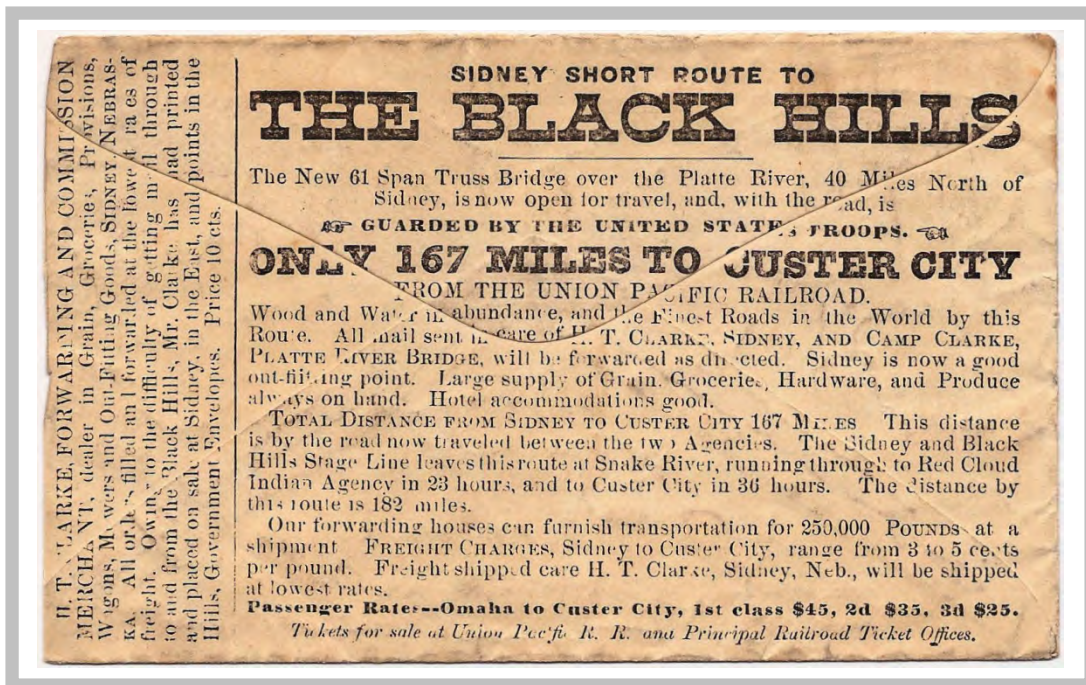


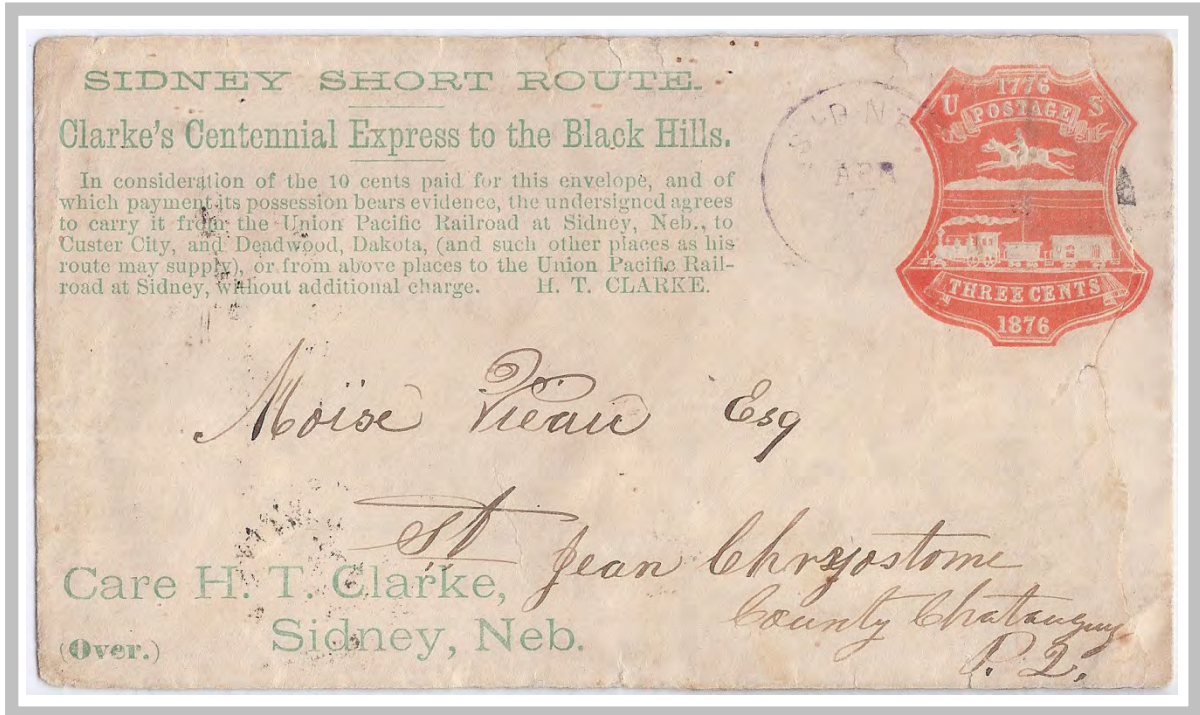
Carried by **Clarke's Centennial Express (Persson Type 7 frank)** from the Black Hills to Sidney, Neb, where it entered the mails with their Nov 7 (likely 1876) postmark for delivery to Cicero, N. Y.



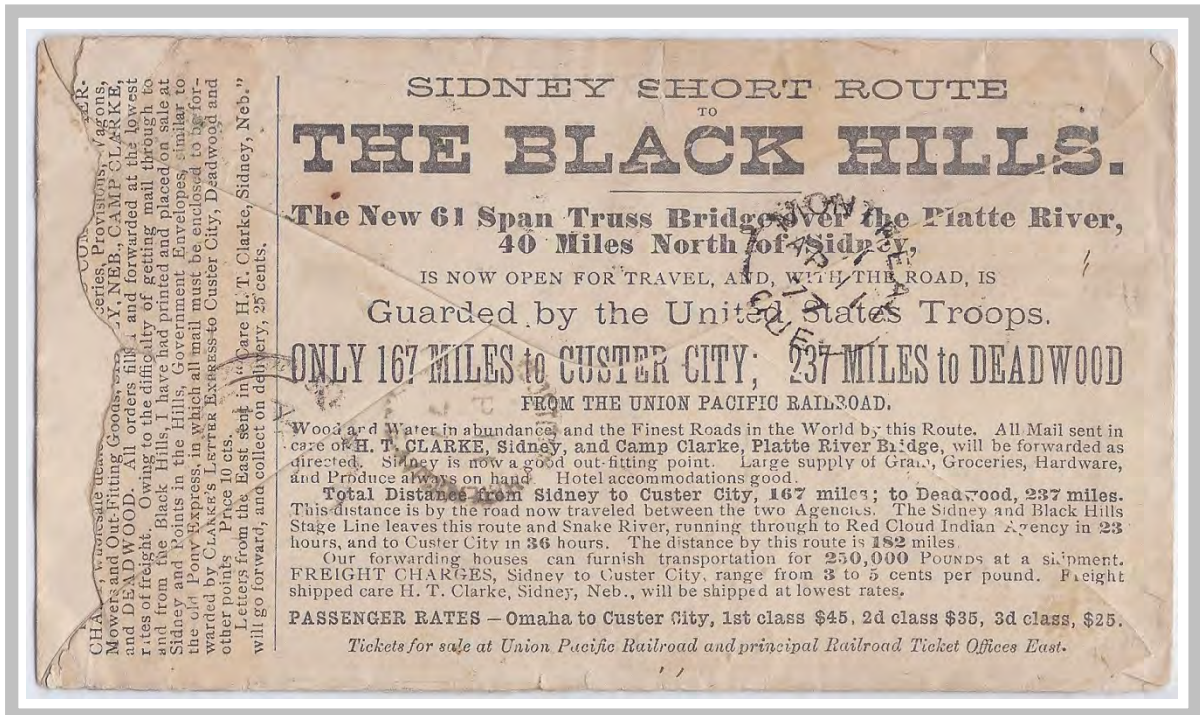


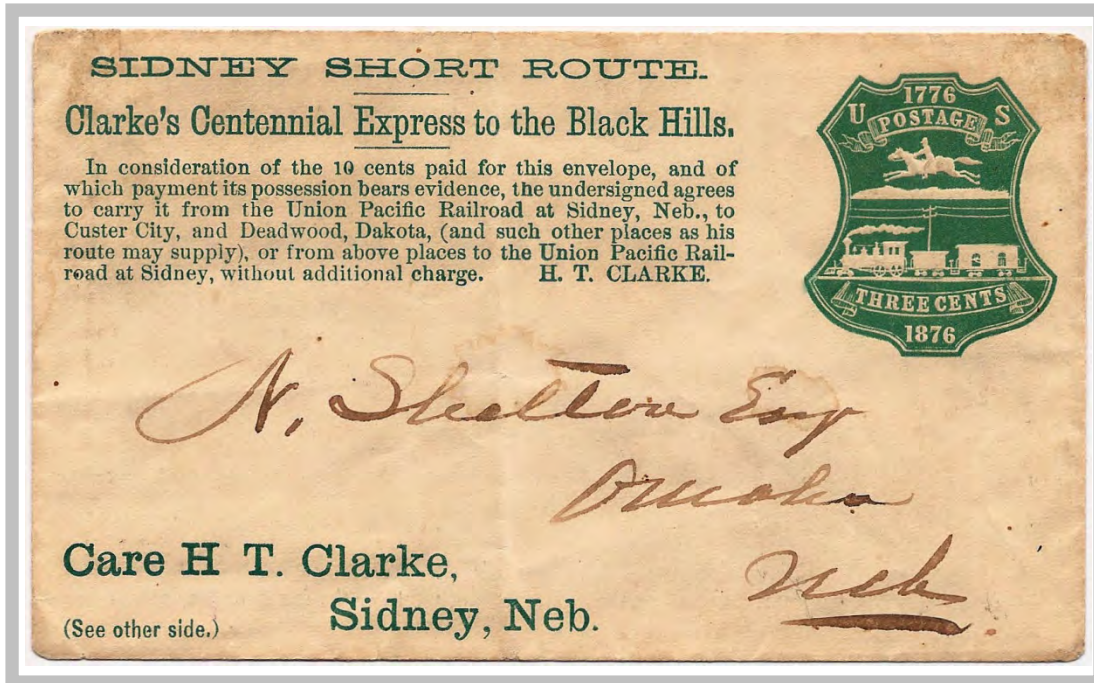
Carried by **Clarke's Centennial Express (Persson Type 8 frank)** from the Black Hills to Sidney, Neb, where it entered the mails with their illegible (likely 1877) postmark for delivery to Fern Creek, Kentucky.



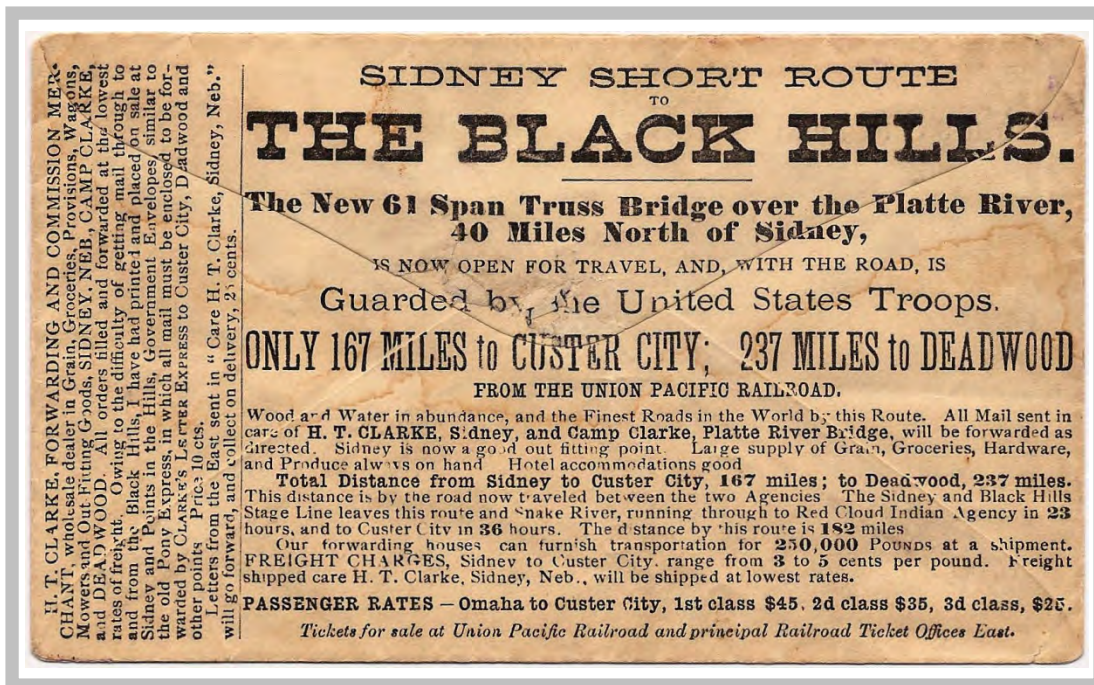


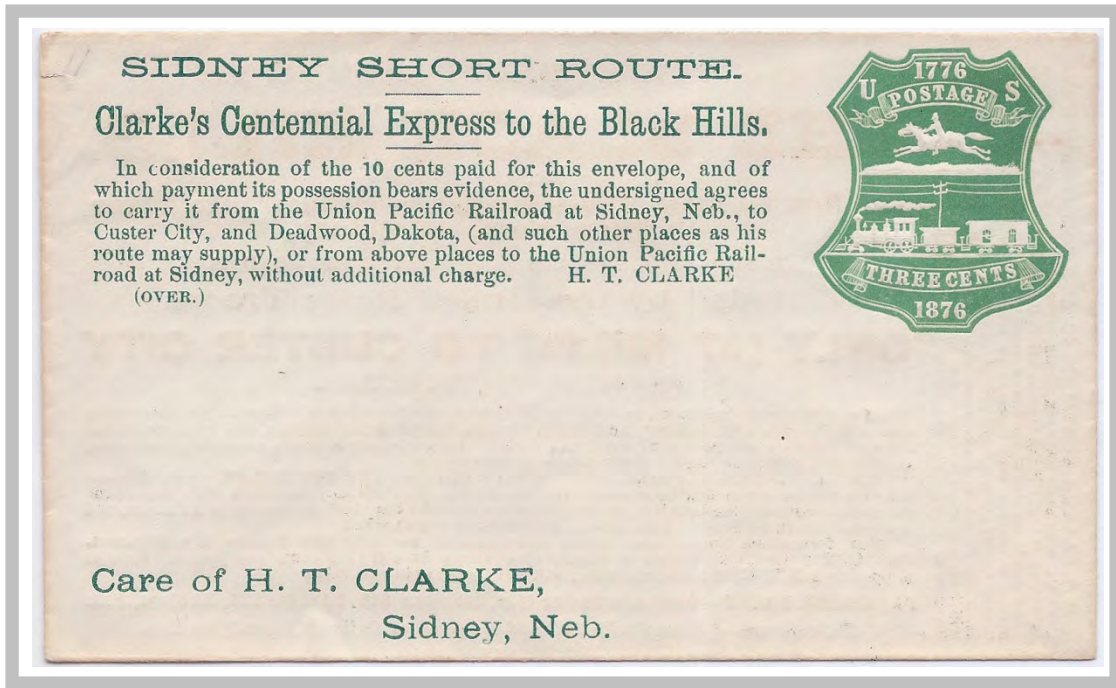
Carried by **Clarke's Centennial Express (Persson Type 9 frank)** from the Black Hills to Sidney, Neb, where it entered the mails with their Apr 7 (1877) postmark for delivery to St. Jean Chryostome, Levis, Quebec (Canada); year-dated based on backstamp.



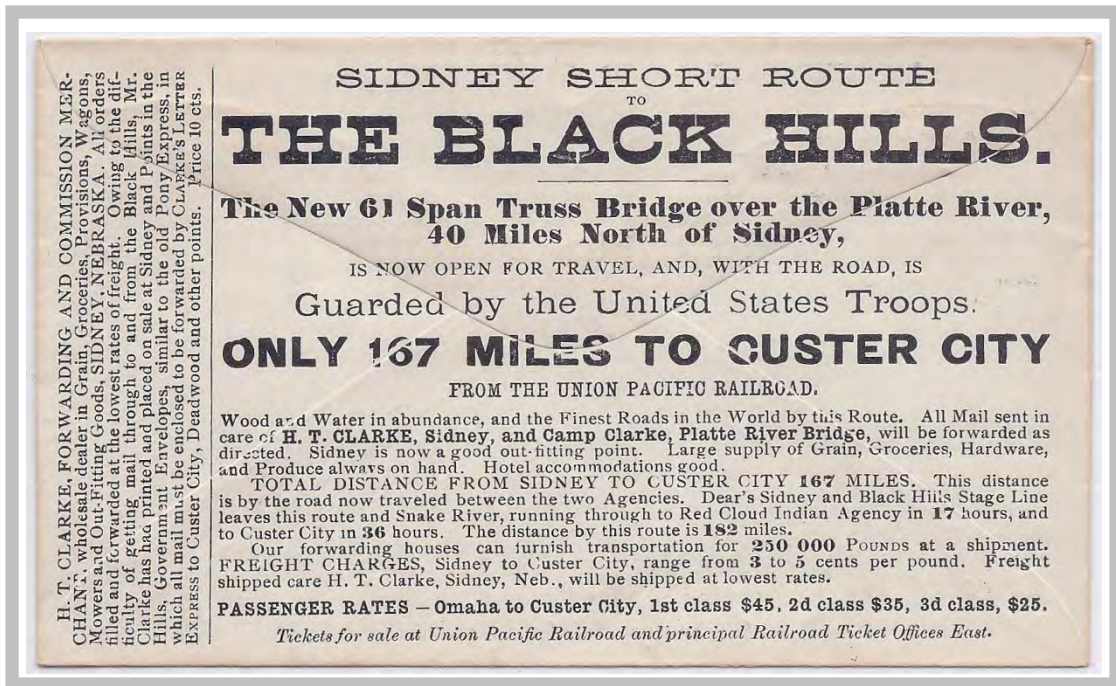


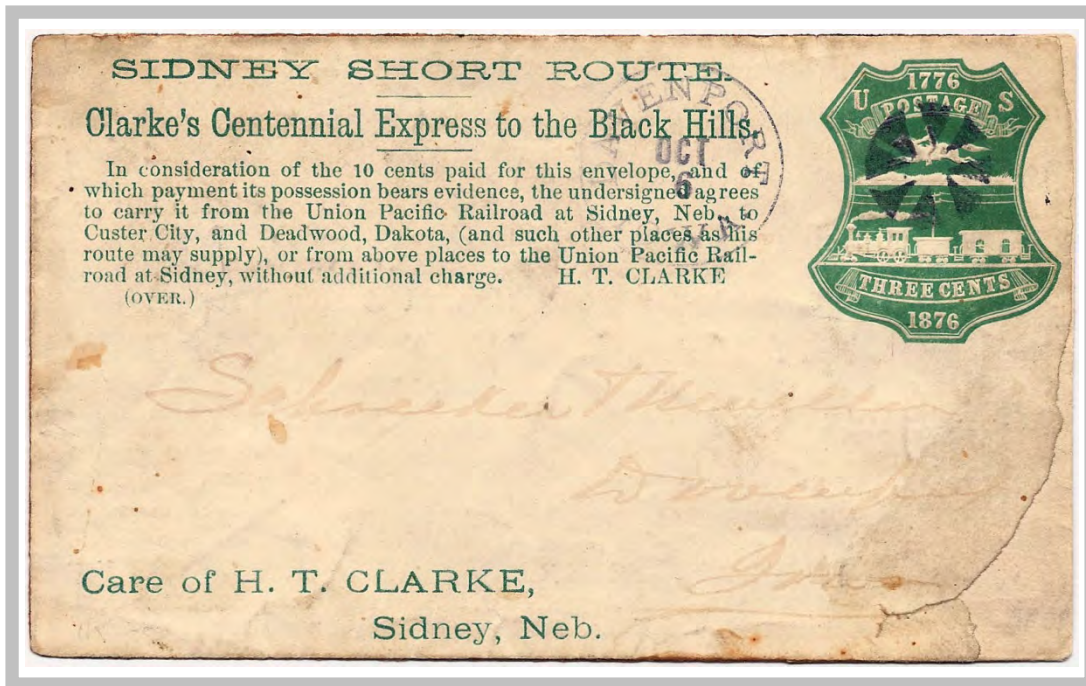
Clarke's Centennial Express (Persson Type 10 frank) . This cover may or may not have been carried by Clarke's Express, as it does not have the typical Sidney, Nebraska postmark. Clarke is known to have sold his printed franked envelopes at Omaha, to where this cover is addressed.



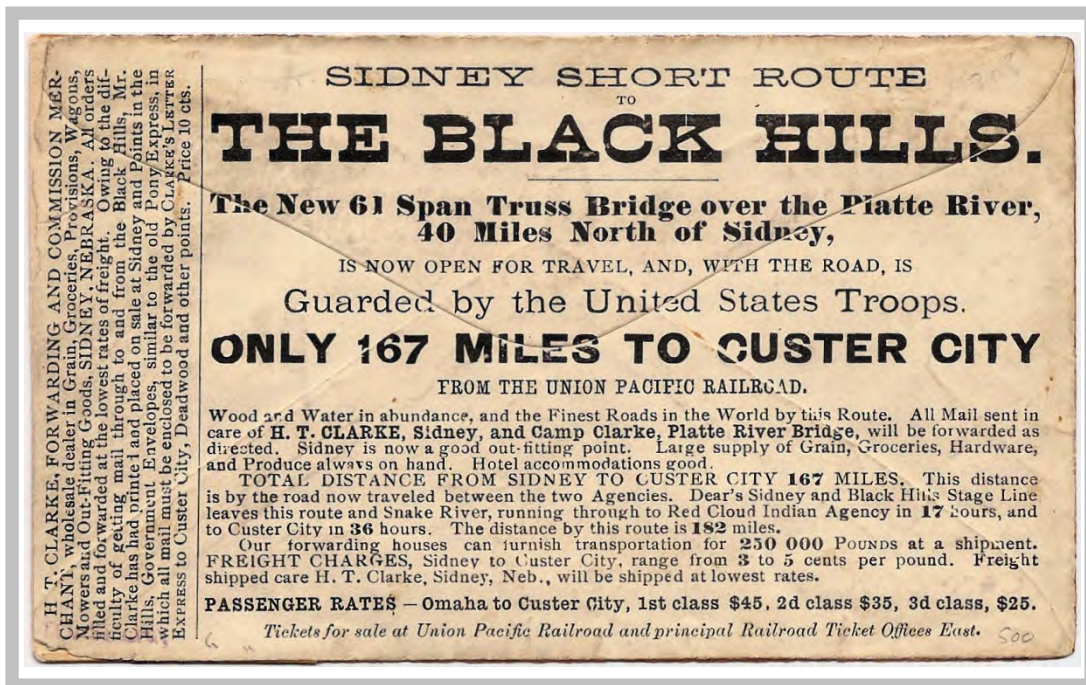


Unused Clarke's Centennial Express (Persson Type 11 frank) . No used examples of this type frank have yet been reported.





Clarke's Centennial Express (Persson Type 11a frank). Another cover that may or may not have been carried by Clarke's Express, as it entered the mails in Davenport, Iowa with their Oct 6 postmark and is addressed to Davenport. Clarke sold printed franked envelopes at various larger cities (e.g., Omaha and Chicago), thus, this could have simply been a leftover unused cover.





Deadwood, Dak. Dec 11 (1877) to Rose, New York. No indication of carriage by the Sidney & Black Hills Stage Line, as shown in the corner card. Undoubtedly, somehow related to this route, however.



The Sidney Stage in an 1880 photo taken in the Flormann Block of Rapid City, Dakota Territory.