



Chapter Thirteen

Pony Express Mail, 1860-1861

The transcontinental Pony Express captured the popular imagination while it operated between April 3, 1860 and October 26, 1861, and has continued to do so ever since. From a postal history perspective, the Pony Express was the combination of a private mail system and a government-subsidized mail system that is unique in American history.

In summary,¹ the Central Overland and California Pike's Peak Express Company (COC&PP) was formed in February 1860 to manage Russell, Majors & Waddell's² passenger, express and contract mail services to the booming regions of Colorado, Salt Lake City and California via the Central Route. In December 1859, the Post Office Department's default route for transcontinental mails had been changed from the via Panama route to the Overland Mail Company's (OMC) Southern Route. From May 1859 to May 1860, the COC&PP and its predecessor companies gained control of the contracts along the Central Route, and began a political campaign to move the lucrative default mail contract from the OMC's Southern Route to their Central Route.

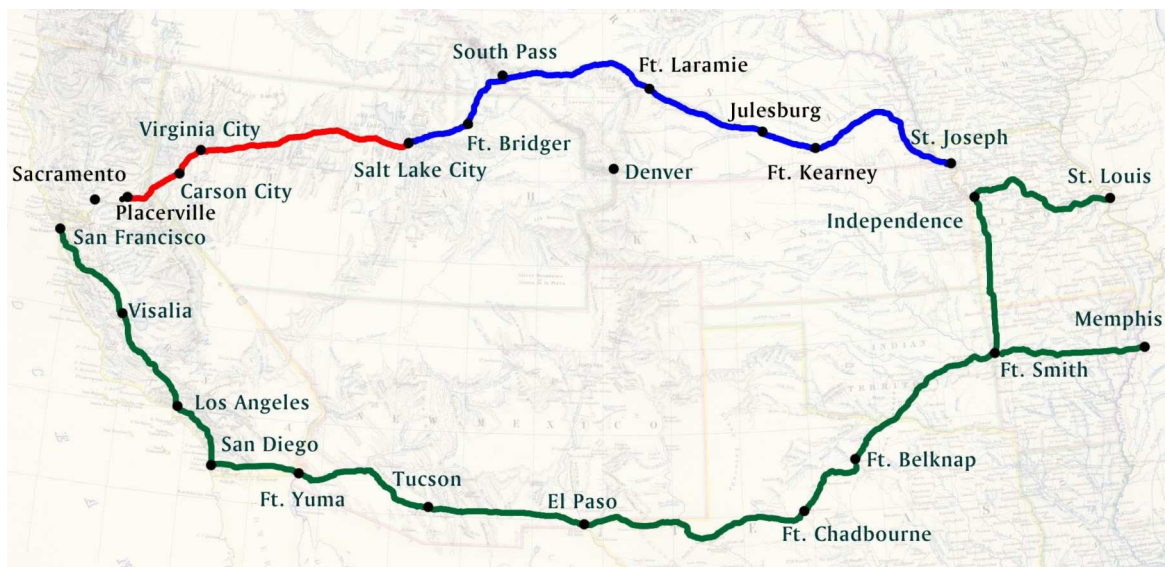


Figure 13-1. Map showing the Central Route (in blue and red) and Southern Route (in green).

The COC&PP needed to prove the superiority of the Central Route over the Southern Route to wrest the contract away from the OMC. Accordingly, on April 3, 1860 they started a much-publicized transcontinental Pony Express along the Central Route, using relays of horse-mounted riders to deliver mail between Missouri and California in the then extraordinary time of ten days. This was the first phase of the Pony Express, under the complete operational and financial control of the COC&PP. No post office subsidies or endorsements were given to them for their service.

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The COC&PP accomplished its goal of establishing the feasibility of the Central Route, and the outbreak of the Civil War convinced Congress that the daily overland mail contract should be moved to the Central Route at the impressive subsidy of \$1 million per year. However, the Post Office Department granted that contract to the OMC on March 12, 1861 (effective July 1) and the COC&PP was relegated to the role of sub-contractor on the eastern portion of the route. Since the contract stated that control of the Pony



**Russell, Majors & Waddell,
Creators of the Pony
Express**

- Partnership formed January 1855
- Dominated military supply contracts in West
- Financially damaged by 1857 Mormon War
- Formed COC&PP subsidiary in February 1860
- Operated Pony Express, April 1860 to June 1861
- Failed financially in 1862

Express was to pass to the OMC on July 1, this created an April-June 1861 interim operational period of the Pony Express. During that time, it was operated as a private enterprise under the joint control of the OMC and the COC&PP. However, preoccupied by the movement of the stagecoach line to the Central Route, the OMC delegated operational control to the COC&PP during that period. To shore up the failing finances of the operation, Wells Fargo & Co. (WF) also became involved as agent for the mail handling services at that time.

The new daily overland mail contract also stipulated the continuation of the twice-weekly Pony Express until the completion of the overland telegraph. This created the post office-subsidized third operational period of the Pony Express. Starting on July 1, the OMC had full operational control and used WF as its agent for the mail handling services. The post office service terminated at Placerville, California so WF also offered a private express service to link Placerville and San Francisco. The telegraph was completed on October 24, 1861 and the Pony Express ceased to operate two days later.

Thus, although the Pony Express has typically been viewed as a single unvaried enterprise, it was actually operated under distinctly different management schemes. These three operational phases encompassed four different rate periods. A brief overview is shown in Table 13-1.

Table 13-1 Summary of the Pony Express Rate Periods

	First Period	Second Period	Third Period	Fourth Period
Westbound Dates	Apr 3, 1860 to Jul 30, 1860	Jul 31, 1860 to Mar 31, 1861	Apr 1, 1861 to Jun 30, 1861	Jul 1, 1861 to Oct 26, 1861
Eastbound Dates	Apr 3, 1860 to Aug 14, 1860	Aug 15, 1860 to Apr 14, 1861	Apr 15, 1861 to Jun 30, 1861	Jul 1, 1861 to Oct 26, 1861
Operator(s)	COC&PP	COC&PP	OMC, COC&PP, WF	P.O., OMC, WF
Express Rate	\$5 per ½ oz.	\$2.50 per ¼ oz.	\$2 per ½ oz.	\$1 per ½ oz.
Schedule	Weekly*	Twice-weekly	Twice-weekly	Twice-weekly
SF-MO Trip Time	10 days	15 days	12 days	12 days

* Schedule increased to twice-weekly from July 7, 1861 to the end of the period.

The First Rate Period, April to August 1860

The first rate period began with the inaugural eastbound and westbound trips on April 3, 1860. As shown in Table 13-1, the basic express fee was \$5 per half ounce, although there was also a short distance rate between San Francisco and Salt Lake City of \$3 per half ounce. Per the regulations for private express companies, U.S. postage from origin to destination had to be paid on all letters. The regulation stipulated the use of U.S. stamped envelopes, but many examples with stamps are known.

Figure 13-2 shows the only known cover carried on the first westbound trip. It originated somewhere in the East and was marked "Paid 5.00" (for the \$5 per half ounce express fee) at the upper left. The letter was enclosed in a 10 cents Nesbitt stamped envelope, in accordance with private express regulations. It was forwarded under cover to the St Joseph COC&PP express agent, who marked it with the Company's April 3 handstamp, and put it on the express leaving St Joseph at 6:30pm on Tuesday April 3, 1860. After a short ride across the Missouri River on the ferry boat *Denver*, the pony rider began his journey to the next relay station. This first westbound mail is reported to have passed through Salt Lake City on April 9 at 6:30pm, and arrived in Sacramento, California at 5:25pm on April 13. The steamer *Antelope* then carried it to San Francisco, where it arrived at 12:38am on April 14. The April 16, 1860 San Francisco *Bulletin* reported that 25 letters were delivered to San Francisco.



Figure 13-2. Cover carried on the first westbound trip that departed from St. Joseph, Missouri on April 3, 1860 and arrived in San Francisco on April 14. (Census #W1)³

Figure 13-3 shows one of two known letters carried on the first eastbound Pony Express trip. This letter was placed in a 10 cents Nesbitt stamped envelope with a red Wells Fargo frank (which served no purpose in this case) and given to the COC&PP express agent in San Francisco. He marked it with his April 3, 1860 black Running Pony handstamp to show that the \$5 express fee had been paid, and placed it on the steamer *New World* to Sacramento. This mail is reported to have passed through Salt Lake City on April 7 at 11:45pm, and arrived in St. Joseph on April 13, where the agent marked it with the April 13 COC&PP handstamp. It was immediately placed in the U.S. mails at St Joseph, and carried by train to New York City, where it was docketed as received on April 17. The August 4, 1860 *Alta California* reported that this first mail consisted of 70 letters and 15 telegraphic dispatches or newspapers.

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Figure 13-3. Cover carried on the first eastbound trip that departed from San Francisco on April 3, 1860 and arrived in St. Joseph, Missouri on April 13. (Census #E1)

Figure 13-4 shows the use of the San Francisco COC&PP handstamp to indicate that express fees had been paid.



Figure 13-4. Cover carried on the eastbound Pony Express trip that departed from San Francisco on May 18, 1860 and arrived in St. Joseph on June 1. (Census #E5)

This 10 cents Nesbitt stamped envelope was given to the San Francisco COC&PP express agent, who marked it with his handstamp on May 18, 1860. It arrived 14 days later in St Joseph. It was marked with the June 1 St Joseph Running Pony handstamp and put into the U.S. mails the following day.

The St Joseph Running Pony handstamp was also used on westbound mail. Figure 13-5 shows an example. This 10 cents Nesbitt stamped envelope originated in New York, per the red "California Pony Express Paid" marking. There is also a faint pencil "5.00" marking, which confirmed that the \$5 express fee had

been paid. The letter was forwarded under cover to the St Joseph COC&PP express agent, who marked it with the June 10 (1860) Running Pony handstamp. The express left St Joseph that day and arrived in San Francisco on June 25.



Figure 13-5. Cover carried on the westbound Pony Express trip that departed from St. Joseph on June 10, 1860 and arrived in San Francisco on June 25. (Census #W8)

Figure 13-6 illustrates the only known example of the short distance \$3 rate. This letter left San Francisco on April 20, 1860 with the third eastbound Pony Express trip. It was addressed to Carson City, Nevada, thus qualifying for the special short distance \$3 per half ounce rate. The San Francisco COCPP agent added the black Running Pony handstamp and noted “3.00” at the upper right to indicate the express fee paid, although the “Central Overland Pony Express Company” frank also served to indicate that express fees had been paid.

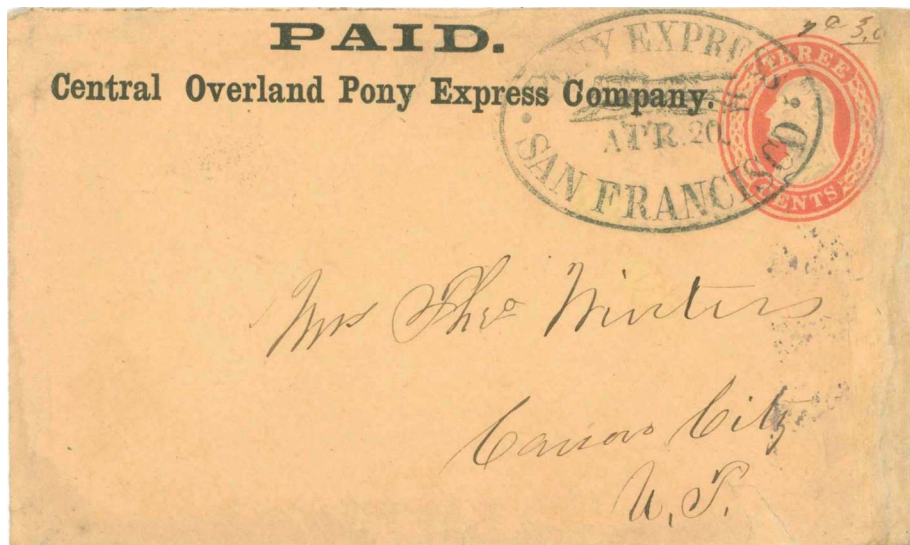


Figure 13-6. Cover carried on the eastbound Pony Express trip that departed from San Francisco on April 20, 1860 and arrived in St. Joseph on April 30. (Census #E53A)

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From late May to July 1860, the Pony Express was severely disrupted by Paiute Indian disturbances in Nevada.⁴ Most of the May-June mail was stopped or significantly delayed through the troubled area, and the risk to pony riders continued into July. Figure 13-7 shows the celebrated letter that was captured by Indians in July 1860.



Figure 13-7. Cover carried on the eastbound Pony Express trip that departed from San Francisco on July 21, 1860 and was intercepted by Indians. (Census #E10)

This letter was given to the San Francisco COC&PP agent, who added his July 21 handstamp to indicate that the \$5 express fee had been paid. The rider was intercepted by Indians at the Mormon Ferry,³ and the mailbag was lost. There is a manuscript note across the front that reads, “recovered from a mail stolen by the Indians in 1860” and the letter has a May 3, 1862 New York receiving mark on the reverse.

The Second Rate Period, August 1860 to April 1861

On July 31, 1860, William Russell sent a notice from Leavenworth, Kansas to COC&PP agents reducing the express rate to \$2.50 per quarter ounce from the previous \$5.00 per half ounce. Although it only reduced the weight progression, it was obviously an effort to increase the volume of mail carried by the Pony Express by reducing the cost of a single letter. The notice was dispatched on the August 1 Pony Express trip from St Joseph that arrived in San Francisco on August 12. News of this rate change was published in San Francisco newspapers on August 15.

Figure 13-8 shows an eastbound letter addressed to New York City during this period. This cover was prepaid the required U.S. postage by an 1859 Type V 10 cents stamp in San Francisco. The COC&PP agent there marked it with his September 29 (1860) blue Running Pony handstamp, indicating that the \$2.50 express fee had been paid. It arrived in St Joseph on October 10, where the COC&PP agent marked it with his COC&PP handstamp. It was placed in the U.S. mails on the following day.



Figure 13-8. Cover carried on the eastbound Pony Express trip that departed from San Francisco on September 29, 1860 and arrived in St. Joseph on October 10. (Census #E22)

Figure 13-9 shows the \$2.50 express rate on a westbound cover during the second period. This 10 cents star die stamped envelope originated in the East, and was forwarded under cover to the St Joseph COC&PP express agent, who marked it with the March 10, 1861 green “double oval” Pony Express handstamp. He also marked it with a manuscript “2.50” near the indicia, indicating that the express fee had been paid. The express arrived in San Francisco on March 23, and the letter was mailed at the post office, where it was postmarked for the March 25 departure of the mail for Portland, Oregon. The presence of a San Francisco postmark on a westbound Pony Express letter is very unusual.

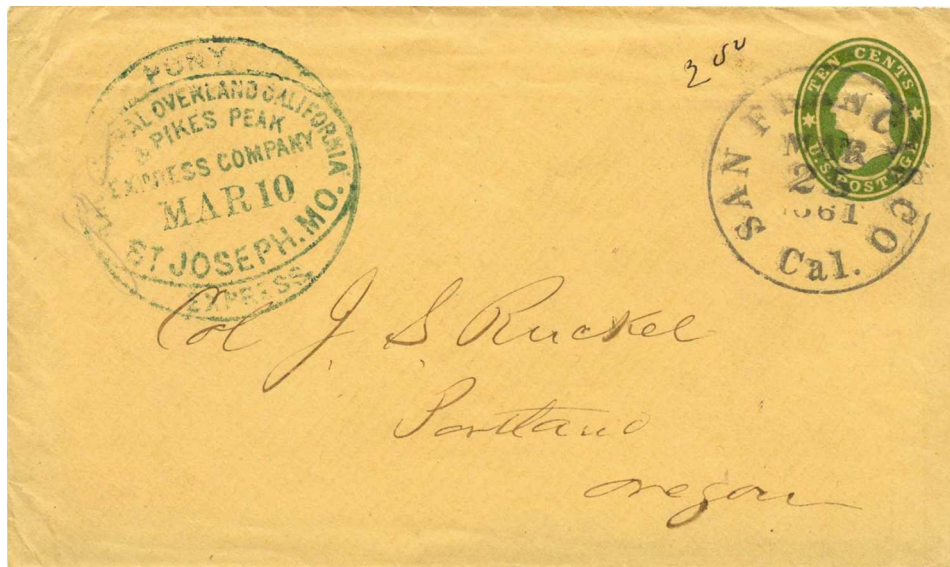


Figure 13-9. Cover carried on the westbound Pony Express trip that departed from St. Joseph on March 10, 1861 and arrived in San Francisco on March 23. (Census #W34)

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Figure 13-10 illustrates a “way” cover collected along the route of the Pony Express, rather than at San Francisco or St Joseph.

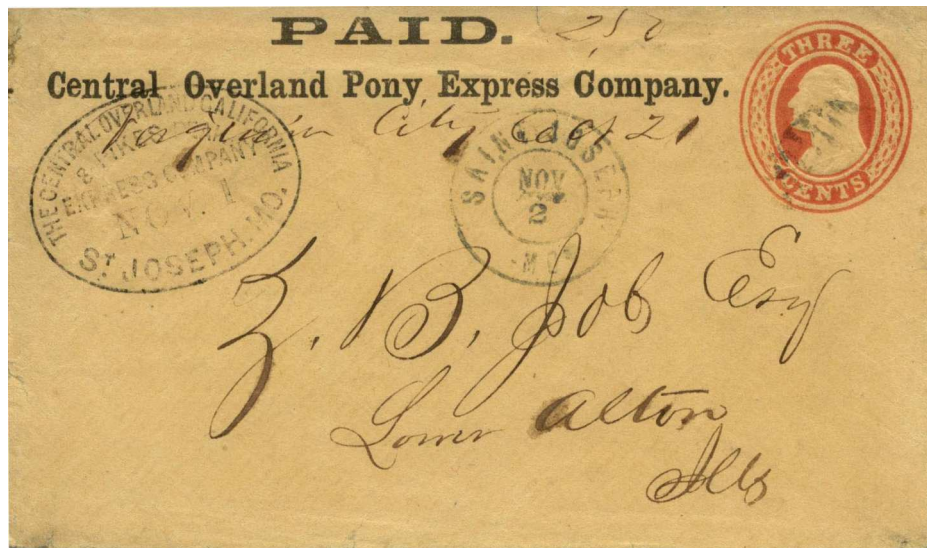


Figure 13-10. Way cover carried on the eastbound Pony Express trip that departed from San Francisco on October 20, 1860 and arrived in St. Joseph on November 1. (Census #E28)

This three cents Nesbitt stamped envelope originated in Virginia City, Nevada on October 21, 1860. The envelope also bears a “Paid Central Overland Pony Express Company” frank to indicate that the \$2.50 express fee had been paid, although the Virginia City agent also added a manuscript “2.50” to confirm that. This type of franked envelope was often used for telegraph messages. It connected with the Pony Express trip that left San Francisco on October 20 and arrived in St Joseph on November 1, where it received a COC&PP handstamp and was placed in the U.S. mails on the following day. U.S. postage of three cents was sufficient in this case because the distance travelled was less than 3,000 miles.

Beginning in early January 1861, Pony Express mail originating in Sacramento was no longer treated as way mail, and began receiving a special Pony Express handstamp. Figure 13-11 shows an April 1861 example.



Figure 13-11. Cover carried on the eastbound Pony Express trip that departed from San Francisco on April 3, 1861 and arrived in St. Joseph on April 16. (Census #E62)

This cover was prepaid 10 cents U.S. postage in Sacramento, and the COC&PP agent there marked it with his April 4 (1861) blue handstamp, indicating that the \$2.50 express fee had been paid. It arrived in St Joseph on April 16, and was placed in the U.S. mails on the following day.

Figure 13-12 shows a westbound cover sent free of U.S. postal charges.

This letter bears the Congressional free frank of William Gwin, senator from California, so it was sent free of any U.S. postage from Washington, D.C. It was sent under cover to St Joseph, where the COC&PP agent added his December 13 (1860) St Joseph Running Pony handstamp. He also marked it "Paid JTC", reflecting the payment (or forgiveness) of the \$2.50 express fee. It left St Joseph on December 13 and arrived in San Francisco on December 28. Senator Gwin sponsored Russell, Majors & Waddell in their quest to obtain the overland contract on the Central Route, and was credited by Majors⁵ as coming up with the idea for the Pony Express.



Figure 13-12. Cover carried on the westbound Pony Express trip that departed from St. Joseph on December 13, 1860 and arrived in San Francisco on December 29. (Census #W27)

The addressee, Frederick Billings, was the first land claims lawyer in San Francisco and a trustee of the College of California. He suggested the name change of that college to the University of California at Berkeley. He later became President of the Northern Pacific Railroad, and the city of Billings, Montana is named after him.

Figure 13-13 shows a Pony Express letter sent to Scotland. This illustrated stagecoach envelope was prepaid 10 cents U.S. postage in San Francisco, and the COC&PP agent there marked it with his

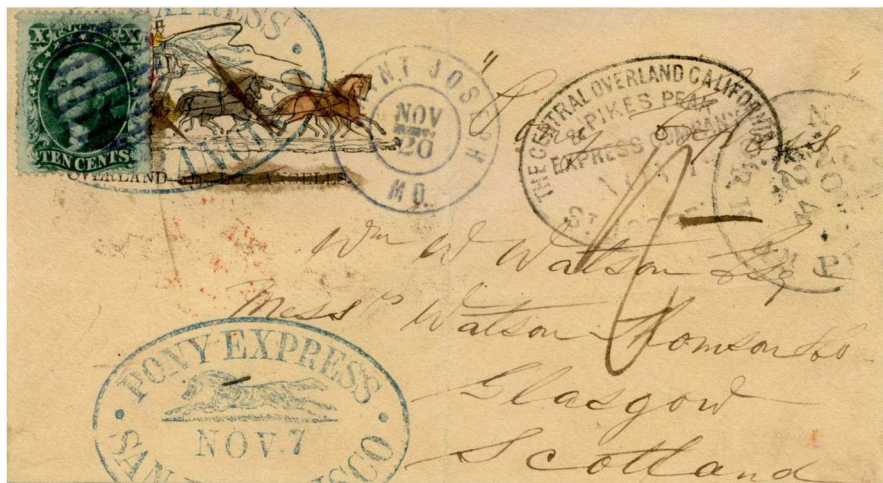


Figure 13-13. Cover carried on the eastbound Pony Express trip that departed from San Francisco on November 7, 1860 and arrived in St. Joseph on November 19. (Census #E38)

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November 7 (1860) blue Running Pony handstamp, indicating that the \$2.50 express fee had been paid. It arrived in St Joseph on November 19, where the agent marked it with a COC&PP handstamp. It was placed in the U.S. mails on the following day, and was postmarked in transit at New York on November 24. Since only 10 cents of the 24 cents rate to Scotland was paid, it was rated as unpaid with a debit to Great Britain of 21 cents (16 cents packet fee plus five cents U.S. inland postage). It was carried to England by the Inman steamer *Kangaroo*, which left on November 24 and arrived in Liverpool on December 7. The recipient in Scotland was charged one shilling postage due.

Figure 13-14 shows the only other known Pony Express letter to Great Britain, but in this case with a red San Francisco Running Pony handstamp. That handstamp, initially applied in black, is seen primarily in blue. For a very short period in March-April 1861, it appeared in red.



Figure 13-14. Cover carried on the eastbound Pony Express trip that departed from San Francisco on April 13, 1861 and arrived in St. Joseph on April 25. (Census #E64)

This letter was given to the San Francisco COC&PP agent with no U.S. postage prepaid, since mail to England could be sent unpaid. The agent applied a dateless red Running Pony handstamp to indicate that the \$2.50 express fee had been paid. He also applied a red April 13 (1861) COC&PP handstamp to indicate the date of departure from San Francisco. That trip arrived in St Joseph on April 25, and its mail was placed in the U.S. post on the following day. This letter was postmarked in New York on April 30, and rated for a five cents debit to Great Britain for U.S. inland postage.⁶ It then left Boston on May 1 aboard the Cunard steamer *Niagara*, which arrived in Queenstown on May 12. The following day, it was rated for one shilling due in Liverpool.

The Third Rate Period, April to June 1861

The end of the COC&PP's sole operational control of the Pony Express occurred in April 1861 when the Post Office contracted with the Overland Mail Company, rather than the COC&PP, to operate the daily overland mail along the Central Route between St. Joseph and Placerville, California. The negotiations preceding the letting of this contract included provisions for the COC&PP's continued involvement as a subcontractor for the handling of mails, both by Pony Express and by stagecoach, but left the OMC fully in charge.

The third rate period lasted from April 1, 1861 (from April 15 in San Francisco, due to the delay in communications from the East) until a postal contract for a daily overland mail took effect on July 1, 1861.

During this phase, Wells, Fargo & Company (WF) was appointed as agents for the handling of the mail, and began issuing special Pony Express \$2 and \$4 adhesive stamps and franked envelopes. WF established new lower rates of \$2 per half ounce to increase the volume of mails carried. The first WF Pony Express \$2 adhesive stamps were used on the April 27, 1861 trip from San Francisco.

Figure 13-15 shows a patriotic envelope carried in June 1861. This 10 cents star die patriotic envelope was given to the WF agent in San Francisco, who franked it with a \$2 Pony Express stamp and marked it with his blue Running Pony handstamp. It left San Francisco on June 1, 1861 and arrived in St Joseph on June 13, where it was immediately placed in the U.S. mails for New York City. This is one of three known Pony Express letters on patriotic envelopes.



Figure 13-15. Cover carried on the eastbound Pony Express trip that departed from San Francisco on June 1, 1861 and arrived in St. Joseph on June 13. (Census #E89)

Eastbound multiple weight letters used \$4 green Pony Express stamps. Figure 13-16 shows the only known example used on cover. This triple rate cover carried \$6 worth of Pony Express stamps and 30 cents in U.S. postage, although 20 cents of the postage is no longer present. It left San Francisco on June 26, 1861 and arrived in St Joseph on July 8, where it was placed in the U.S. mails to New York City.



Figure 13-16. Triple-weight letter carried on the eastbound Pony Express trip that left San Francisco on June 26, 1861 and arrived in St. Joseph on July 8. (Census #E105)

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Westbound letters were sent under cover in packets addressed to the St. Joseph post office for delivery to the Pony Express agent, and WF created a special westbound franked envelope for the \$2 express rate. Only two examples, used in May-June 1861, are known. These Type I WF franked envelopes, not denominated for the \$2 express fee, can be distinguished from the later Type II WF franked envelopes by the use of 10 cents Nesbitt stamped envelopes, a comma after the word “Placerville,” and the absence of the printed directive to the Agent of the Pony Express in the address panel. Figure 13-17 illustrates the Type I WF franked envelope.



Figure 13-17. Cover carried on the westbound Pony Express trip that departed from St. Joseph on May 12, 1861 and arrived in San Francisco on May 23. (Census #W41)

This WF Type I franked envelope was purchased for \$2.10 (\$2 express fee plus 10 cents U.S. postage) from the New York WF agent, who applied the blue May 7 (1861) “California Pony Express New-York” handstamp. It was sent in a packet to St Joseph, where the COC&PP agent applied a May 11 COC&PP “double oval” handstamp, later corrected to the actual departure date of May 12. It arrived in San Francisco on May 23.



Figure 13-18. Cover carried on the westbound Pony Express trip that departed from St. Joseph on April 14, 1861 and arrived in San Francisco on April 25. (Census #W38)

Most westbound mail during this period was not enclosed in WF Type I franked envelopes, probably because they were not available until May. Figure 13-18 shows an example in WF franked envelope..

The WF black transcontinental frank on this 10 cents Nesbitt envelope was used to indicate payment of the delivery express fee. The agent in New York applied a blue April 6 (1861) “California Pony Express New-York” handstamp, and sent it under cover to St Joseph. The

COC&PP agent there applied an April 14 green “double oval” handstamp to indicate the date of departure, and it arrived in San Francisco on April 25.

The Fourth Rate Period, July to October 1861

The fourth and final rate period of the Pony Express began on July 1, 1861 when the Pony Express became a partially subsidized, government-mandated, postal service. The postal contract included a clause that stipulated that the Overland Mail Company:

be required also during the continuance of their Contract, or until the completion of the Overland Telegraph, to run a Pony Express Semi-weekly at a Schedule of times of ten days eight months of the year and twelve days four months of the year, and to convey for the Government free of charge five pounds of Mail Matter; with liberty of charging the public for transportation of letters by said Express not exceeding One dollar per half ounce.

In the prior three rate periods, the Pony Express fee covered the service between San Francisco and Placerville. In this period, it became an additional service by WF and was subject to an additional charge of 10 cents. This service fee, plus the cost of the 10 cents U.S. postage, meant that a user based in San Francisco had to pay 20 cents (25 cents if not in a WF franked entire), in addition to the \$1 pony express fee.

Eastbound mails were collected at WF offices and transmitted to Placerville or the nearest Pony Express station for the additional charge of 10 cents. Westbound mail continued to be sent under cover to the St. Joseph post office in July and early August 1861. By the middle of August, a new westbound mail handling procedure was adopted. Pony Express franked envelopes, pre-addressed to the Pony Express Agent in St. Joseph, began to be sold in eastern WF offices. These franked envelopes were deposited directly into the U.S. postal system at the point of origin and transmitted individually to the Pony Express agent in St. Joseph.

Because of the lower rates in the fourth rate period, WF introduced a new set of \$1, \$2 and \$4 adhesive stamps for eastbound mail and a \$1 franked envelope for westbound mail. In addition, a \$1 “garter” stamp was created for multiple-weight westbound mails.

A cover carried on the first trip of the fourth period is shown in Figure 13-19. As required, this letter was enclosed in a WF 10 cents star die franked envelope that cost 20 cents for the U.S.



Figure 13-19. Cover carried on the eastbound Pony Express trip that left San Francisco on July 3, 1861. It arrived in St Joseph around July 15. (Census #E109)

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postage and the 10 cents WF fee. The express agent added a \$1 WF stamp for the Pony Express service and dispatched it on July 3, 1861.

One of the two known covers showing usage of the \$2 WF green adhesive is shown in Figure 13-20. This double-weight letter, enclosed in a regulation WF 10 cents "Watermelon" envelope, was franked with additional 10 cents U.S. postage and a \$2 WF stamp. It was carried on the last eastbound Pony Express trip, which left San Francisco on October 23, 1861 and arrived in Atchison, Kansas on November 7.



Figure 13-20. Double-weight cover carried on the last eastbound Pony Express trip that departed from San Francisco on October 23, 1861 and arrived in Atchison on November 7. (Census #E180)

One of two covers known with the triple-weight \$4 WF black adhesive is shown in Figure 13-21. This large cover originated at the U.S. Consulate in Honolulu, Hawaii and was sent under cover to the forwarder McRuer & Merrill in San Francisco. That forwarder entrusted it to WF on August 10, and paid the triple-weight fee represented by the \$4 WF stamp. Because it is addressed to the U.S. Treasury, this letter was sent free of any U.S. postal charges. It left San Francisco on August 10, and arrived in St Joseph on August 22, where it was immediately put into the U.S. mails for Washington, D.C.



Figure 13-21. Triple-weight cover carried on the Pony Express trip that departed from San Francisco on August 10, 1861 and arrived in St Joseph on August 22. (Census #E140)

Commencing with the trip leaving San Francisco on September 11, 1861, the eastern terminus for the pony riders was changed from St. Joseph to Atchison, Kansas to connect with the St. Joseph & Atchison Railway. On eastbound Pony Express mails, this change of terminus resulted in letters being delivered into the Atchison post office rather than the St. Joseph office

until the end of the period. An extraordinary cover that entered the U.S. mails at Atchison is shown in Figure 13-22.



Figure 13-22. Patriotic cover carried on the Pony Express trip that departed from San Francisco on September 14, 1861 and arrived in Atchison on September 27. (Census #E160)

This patriotic envelope was given to a San Francisco WF agent, who franked it with a \$1 WF stamp and 30 cents U.S. postage for the Prussian Closed Mail rate to Hamburg, Germany. He also marked it with his September 14 (1861) handstamp, to indicate the date that it left San Francisco. That trip arrived in Atchison on September 27, where it was put into the U.S. mails for New York. The New York foreign mail office marked it with an October 5 “7 Paid” postmark for the departure of the HAPAG steamer *Saxonia* to Southampton, England. The letter arrived there on October 17, and was processed in transit through Aachen on October 19.

As described above, WF collected eastbound letters at its many express offices and transferred them to the Pony Express, typically at Sacramento. Figure 13-23 shows an example.

This letter was enclosed in an overprinted WF 10 cents star die franked envelope⁷ at Marysville, California that cost 20 cents. The Marysville WF agent added a \$1 WF stamp for the Pony Express service, cancelled it with his July 17 handstamp, and sent it to Sacramento, where the agent added his July 18 Pony Express handstamp. It caught the Pony Express trip that passed through Sacramento that day and arrived in St Joseph on July 29.



Figure 13-23. Cover carried on the eastbound Pony Express trip that left San Francisco on July 17, 1861 and arrived in St. Joseph on July 29. (Census #E116)

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Until mid-August 1861, westbound letters were sent in packets addressed to the St. Joseph post office for delivery to the Pony Express agent. These packets were opened at the St Joseph post office, and some of the letters in them were postmarked there.

Figure 13-24 shows an example of this. This letter was datelined on July 3, 1861 in London and sent under cover to a forwarder in New York. It was carried from England on the Cunard steamer *Asia*, which left Liverpool on July 6 and arrived in New York on July 18. The New York WF agent added the blue July 20 “California Pony Express New-York” marking to reflect payment of the \$1 express fee, and franked it with 10 cents U.S. postage. It was then sent under cover to St Joseph, where the postmaster opened the package and postmarked this letter on July 28 before giving it to the Pony Express agent. The agent then date stamped it on July 28 for the trip that departed on that day. After carriage by pony express to Placerville, the letter was given to WF for delivery in San Francisco for an additional 15 cents fee (not marked).



Figure 13-24. Cover carried on the westbound Pony Express trip that left St. Joseph on July 28, 1861 and arrived in San Francisco on August 8. (Census #W46)

WF created a new Type II franked envelope for the \$1 express rate to reflect the new westbound mail handling procedures that were introduced in mid-August 1861. These envelopes, still not denominated for the \$1 express fee, can be distinguished by the use of 10 cents “Watermelon” stamped envelopes and the printed directive to the Agent of the Pony Express in the address panel. It is this last feature that caused the creation of new franked envelopes, since Pony Express mail was now to be dispatched in the U.S. mails from the various origin points to St Joseph. The frank reads “Paid from St Joseph to Placerville per Pony Express,” so the additional 15 cents WF fee for carriage from Placerville to San Francisco still had to be collected on delivery.

Figure 13-25 shows an example of the Type II WF franked envelope. This envelope was acquired by the sender for \$1.10 at the WF office in New York City (\$1 Pony Express charge plus 10 cents for the government entire), and was placed in the regular mails in New York on October 5, 1861. Upon receipt by the postmaster in St. Joseph, it was recorded and delivered to the Pony Express agent, who date stamped it with his October 10 “double oval” marking. After carriage by pony express to Placerville, the letter was delivered by WF to Sacramento for an additional 15 cents fee.

Two days after the October 24, 1861 completion of the overland telegraph, Wells Fargo announced that the Pony Express service was terminated. The last westbound trip made by the Pony Express departed St. Joseph on October 23, 1861 (date stamped as October 24). However, by the time that the news of the

termination was disseminated in the East, there was some mail already in transit, since mail took as much as three days to get to St. Joseph. Accordingly, the October 27 and October 31 mails were still processed by the St. Joseph agent as pony mail. However, when the bags arrived at Atchison they were put on daily overland mail coaches.

The San Francisco newspapers report these two late “Pony Express” arrivals in about 22 days from St Joseph, which is more consistent with the timing of the daily overland stagecoach. The San Francisco *Bulletin* of November 18, 1861 announced the arrival of “The Last Pony Express” carrying 78 letters. Then, the November 21 *Alta California* reported the arrival on the previous night of a Pony Express mail with 53 letters. Figure 13-26 shows a cover from the October 27, 1861 mail.



Figure 13-25. Cover carried on the westbound Pony Express trip that departed from St. Joseph on October 10, 1861 and arrived in San Francisco on October 22. (Census #W61)



Figure 13-26. Cover intended for the westbound Pony Express trip scheduled to depart from St. Joseph on October 27, 1861 but carried to San Francisco by stagecoach on November 18. (Census #W68)

This double-weight Type II WF franked envelope with \$1 “garter” stamp was purchased by the sender for \$2.20 (including the 20 cents U.S. postage) at the Boston WF office and was placed in the U.S. mails on October 19, 1861. Upon receipt by the postmaster in St. Joseph, it was recorded and delivered to the Pony Express agent, who date stamped it with his October 27 “double oval” marking. The Pony Express had

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ceased operation the day before, so it was placed on the daily overland coach which arrived in San Francisco on November 18.

The Pony Express is possibly the most representative icon of the West. The postal artifacts that survive from this brief enterprise will undoubtedly continue to hold the fascination of postal historians for years to come.

Endnotes

1. The 1860-61 Pony Express has been thoroughly researched, most notably in Frajola, Kramer & Walske, *The Pony Express, A Postal History*, (New York: The Philatelic Foundation, 2005).
2. The Russell, Majors & Waddell partnership had been formed in January 1855 to pursue government contracts to supply U.S. military installations west of the Missouri River, based out of Leavenworth, Kansas Territory. In April 1859, William Russell started the Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Express Company (L&PP) to provide stagecoach passenger and express services between Missouri and the booming Colorado Pike's Peak region. L&PP also obtained the U.S. mail contract between Missouri and Salt Lake City in May 1859, but the company failed and was ultimately absorbed by the COC&PP. In this way, Russell, Majors & Waddell backed into the Post Office contract mail business.
3. The references to Census W(estbound) or E(astbound) numbers are to the pictorial census in Appendix B in *The Pony Express, A Postal History*. An updated pictorial census of Pony Express covers is maintained at <http://www.rfrajola.com/ponyHTM/PonyCensus.htm>.
4. This period was extensively researched by Scott Trepel in *The Impacts of Indian Attacks on the Pony Express in 1860*, (Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc., 2014).
5. Trepel, *The Impacts of Indian Attacks on the Pony Express*, page 31.
6. Alexander Majors, *Seventy Years on the Frontier: Alexander Majors' Memoirs of a Lifetime on the Border*. Reprint of 1893 edition, (Columbus, OH: Long's College Book Co., 1950), pages 182-84.
7. The domestic transcontinental rate was 10 cents per half ounce, so the Post Office Department received five cents less on this letter because of the terms in the U.S.-Great Britain postal agreement.
8. Wells Fargo re-used Freeman's Express franked envelopes, overprinted with the WF frank.