



## Chapter Seven

### Central Overland Mail, 1850-1861

Chapter Five described the opening of private and semi-private mail services over the Central Route. Starting in 1850, the U.S. Post Office Department began to extend its overland contract mail route system westward. Figure 7-1 shows the three segments which ultimately received mail contracts along the Central Route, and the alternate California route between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City.

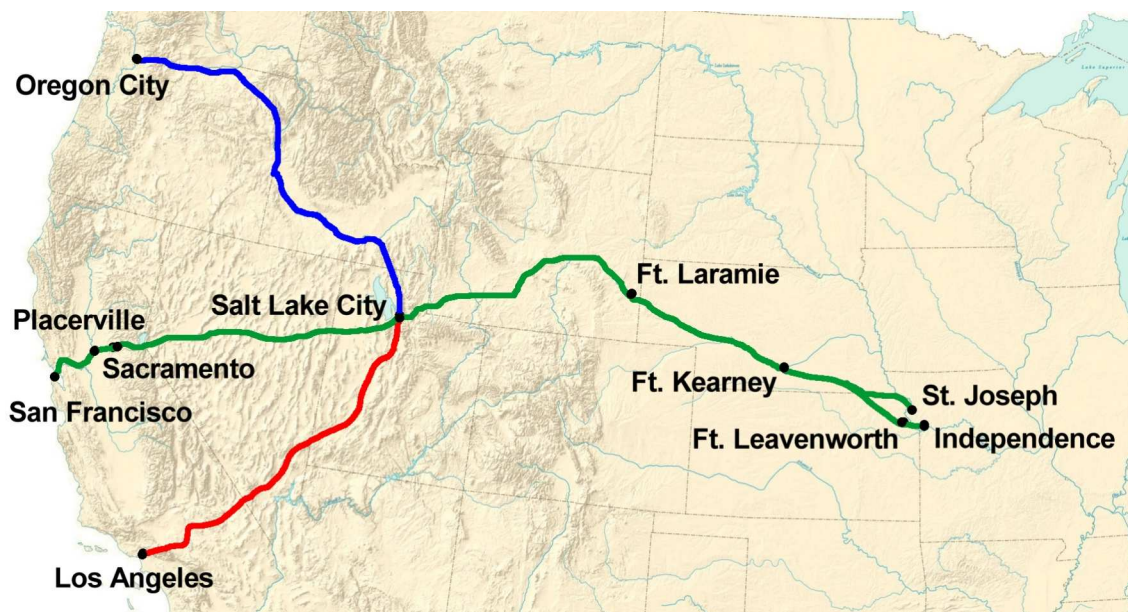


Figure 7-1. Figure 7-1. Map of the Central Route segments, consisting of Salt Lake City-Independence; Salt Lake City-Sacramento/Los Angeles; and Salt Lake City-Oregon.

Salt Lake City (in today's Utah) was the central element in this route system, and no single contract linked the east and west coasts over this route until the start of the daily overland contract mail service in July 1861. This chapter will examine the various mail contracts along the Central Route in chronological order: between Salt Lake City and Missouri, between Salt Lake City and California, and between Salt Lake City and Oregon.

#### Contract Route between Salt Lake City and Missouri

Table 7-1 summarizes the mail contracts between Salt Lake City and Missouri that are described in this chapter. Detailed schedules and many actual trip times for these contracts can be found in Appendix D.

**Table 7-1 – Mail Contracts between Salt Lake City and Missouri, 1850-1861**

Dates of Operation	Contractor	Route No.	Missouri Terminus	Contracted Service
Aug 1, 1850 to Jun 30, 1854	Woodson	4965	Independence	Monthly in 30 days
Jul 1, 1854 to Nov 30, 1856	Magraw	8911	Independence	Monthly in 30 days
Dec 1, 1856 to Jan 31, 1857	(none)			Individual trip contracts
Feb 2, 1857 to Jun 30, 1857	Kimball	8911	Independence	Monthly in 30 days
Jul 1, 1857 to Sep 30, 1857	(none)			No service
Oct 1, 1857 to Mar 30, 1858	Miles	8911	Independence	Monthly in 30 days
May 1, 1858 to Jun 30, 1859	Hockaday	8911	St. Joseph	Weekly in 22 days
Jul 1, 1859 to Jun 30, 1861	COC&PP	8911	St. Joseph	Twice-monthly in 22 days

### Woodson Contract, 1850 to 1854

On May 20, 1850, the U.S. post office solicited proposals for a mail route between Oregon City and Independence, Missouri via Salt Lake City. The accepted proposal from James Brown and Samuel Woodson was only between Salt Lake City and Independence, and included monthly trips in about 30 days each way. All trips were to leave on the first of each month and arrive by the last of each month, with operations beginning on August 1, 1850 from Independence. In December 1850, Brown died, so the contract was subsequently transferred in its entirety to Woodson.

Until way stations were established along the route, Woodson had difficulty adhering to the 30-day schedule. He encountered particular difficulty on the Fort Laramie-Salt Lake City section of the route, so he sub-contracted that portion of the route to Feramorz Little, starting on August 1, 1851.

#### Feramorz Little, Mormon Mail Carrier, 1820-1887



- Born in New York to the sister of Brigham Young
- Left New York in 1843 for Nauvoo, Illinois
- Migrated to Salt Lake City in September 1850
- Obtained SLC-Ft. Laramie mail contract in 1851

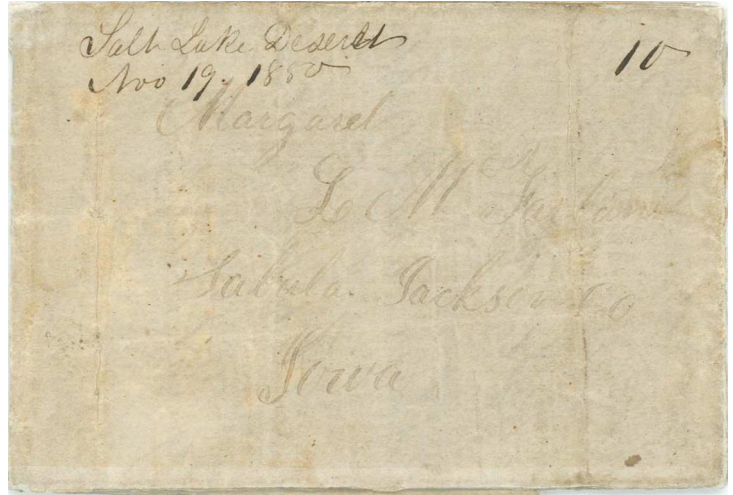
- Co-founded Deseret National Bank in 1872
- Mayor of Salt Lake City from 1876 to 1882

Throughout this period, both Woodson and Little were often unable to negotiate the mountain snows during the winter months, and many trips did not get through to their destination. Appendix D describes many of the difficulties encountered.

After severe interruptions in service from Salt Lake City during the winters of 1850-51 and 1851-52, the Salt Lake City postmaster sent the December-March eastbound mails in 1852-53 and 1853-54 via San Pedro (the port of Los Angeles), California. This mail was carried down the Old Spanish Trail under the Chorpenning contract (see

below for more information about this contract), and then carried east by steamships via Panama to New York. Fewer than 40 percent of the trips for which sufficient information is available were completed within the contractual 30 days. This non-performance apparently convinced the post office not to renew the contract for Route 4965 after June 30, 1854.

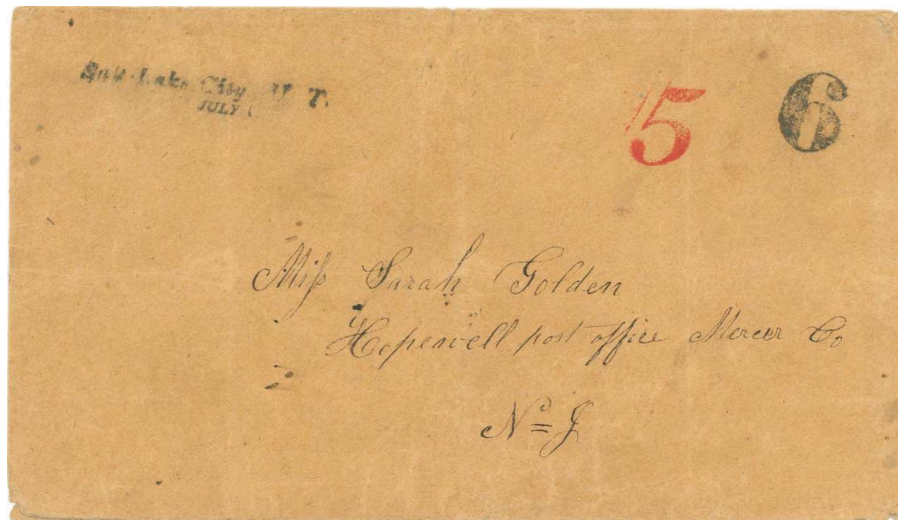
Examples of mail carried during this period are rare. Figure 7-2 shows an example postmarked at “Salt Lake Deseret” on November 19, 1850.



This is the earliest known letter from this period, and was scheduled to be carried on the third eastbound Woodson contract trip. However, the severity of the 1850-51 winter snows caused the November-April mails to be held until the May 1, 1851 departure from Salt Lake City. Accordingly, this letter arrived in Independence around May 31, fully six months after it was posted in Salt Lake City. It was written by an emigrant to California who had reached Salt Lake too late to cross the snowbound mountain passes to California. It was rated 10 cents due for the postage to Sabula, Iowa.

**Figure 7-2.** Letter postmarked “Salt Lake Deseret” on November 19, 1850 and carried under the Woodson contract to Independence.

Figure 7-3 illustrates a July 1, 1851 letter from Salt Lake City to New Jersey. This letter received the new Salt Lake City U.T. (Utah Territory) italic straightline postmark which replaced the series of manuscript postmarks used previously. The Salt Lake City post office was apparently confused by the new July 1, 1851 postal rates. This letter was initially rated for six cents due, reflecting the new over 3,000 mile transcontinental rate, but later re-rated for five cents due, reflecting the correct unpaid rate for less than 3,000 miles to New Jersey.



**Figure 7-3.** Letter postmarked Salt Lake City U.T. on July 1, 1851 and carried under the Woodson contract to Independence.

Mail was collected and delivered along the route at Fort Laramie and Fort Kearny. Eastbound trips were expected to leave Laramie around the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month, and to take another fifteen days to reach Independence.

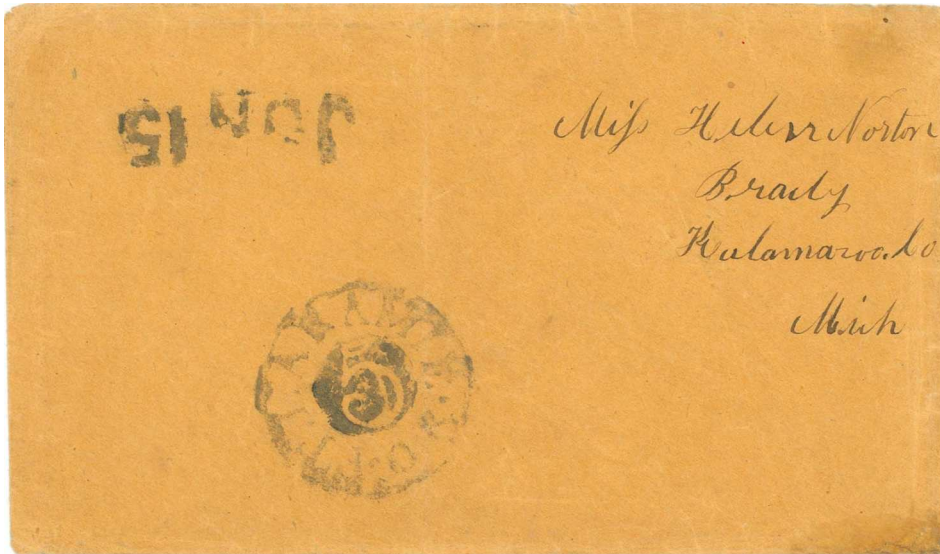


Figure 7-4. Letter postmarked at Fort Laramie O.R. (Oregon Route) on June 15, 1852 and carried under the Woodson contract to Independence.

Figure 7-4 shows a June 1852 example sent from Fort Laramie to Michigan. This letter was posted at Fort Laramie and postmarked for the expected June 15, 1852 departure of the Woodson mail carrier from the fort. The postmaster used three hand-carved markings: an undated circular “Ft Laramie O.R.” (Oregon Route),<sup>2</sup> the straight-line date, and a negative “5” due. The due is a separate handstamp, but was carefully positioned in the center of the Fort

Laramie circular marking. The June mail, however, left twelve days late from Salt Lake City, and probably reached Fort Laramie around June 23. This letter arrived in Independence around July 8.

Figure 7-5 shows an 1852 cover that made a lengthy round trip to and from Fort Laramie. This letter was postmarked in San Francisco on August 15, 1852 and rated “Paid 6” for the transcontinental postage to

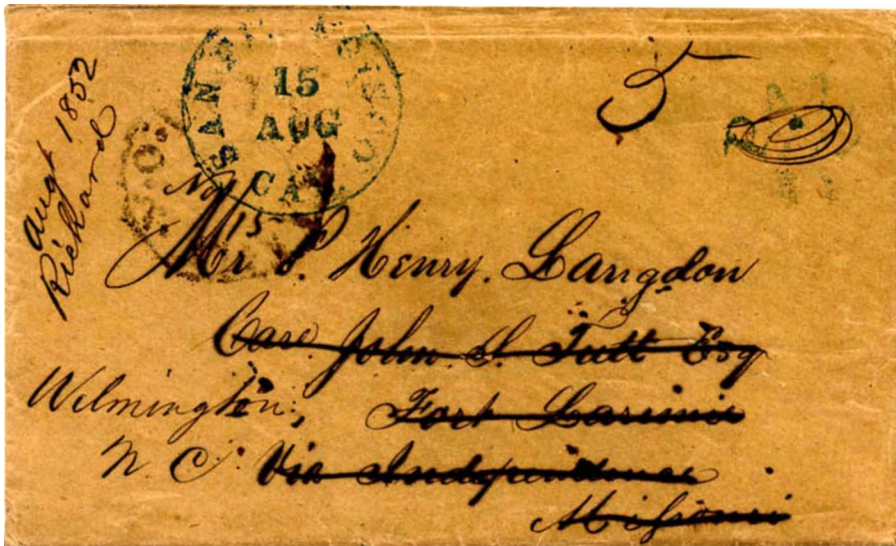


Figure 7-5. Letter postmarked at San Francisco on August 15, 1852 and sent via Panama to Fort Laramie. It was then forwarded back to North Carolina.

Fort Laramie. Endorsed “via Independence Missouri” it was carried by the PMSS steamer *Panama* which left San Francisco on August 15 and arrived in Panama on August 31. After a trip across the Isthmus of Panama, it was taken by the USMSC steamer *Illinois* to New York on September 12. It was then sent to Independence, Missouri to catch the October 1 Woodson mail, which arrived at Fort Laramie around October 15. It was delivered there to John Tull, who re-addressed it to Wilmington, North Carolina. It was then postmarked “Ft Laramie O.R.” on

November 15, reflecting the expected departure of the mail for Independence, and was rated for five cents due after crossing out the San Francisco “Paid 6.” Heavy snow and frigid temperatures between Fort

Laramie and Fort Kearny, however, prevented the mail from leaving Fort Laramie until January 12. It finally arrived back in Independence on February 4, and reached North Carolina in mid-February.

Figure 7-5 also shows that the preferred route from the West Coast to Independence and Fort Laramie was by steamships via Panama. By 1852, it was clear that weather problems along the Central Route were causing significant delays in the overland mails, and that the Panama route was much more reliable. The endorsement “Fort Laramie via Independence Missouri” was also in conformance with a Post Office directive. The March 17, 1853 Hannibal *Missouri Courier* observed that:

Generally, however, the mistake is made in directing letters, “Fort Laramie Oregon Route.” In the haste with which these letters are distributed at the various offices in the United States, the eye catching the word “Oregon,” it is at once supposed that it is to be sent by the California steamers, and off it goes in that direction. To ensure its getting to Fort Laramie, nothing more is necessary than to direct it, “Fort Laramie, via Independence Mo.

Figure 7-6 shows a June 1852 letter from Fort Kearny (in today’s Nebraska) to New Jersey. This letter was datelined “Fort Kearny June 15<sup>th</sup>/52” and posted at the fort. It was prepaid three cents postage to New Jersey and postmarked with the fancy “Ft Kearny O.R.” (Oregon Route) spread eagle postmark. A manuscript “June 22/52” was added to the postmark, reflecting the expected departure date of the mail for Independence. This letter was carried in the same mail as Figure 7-4, which was late in leaving Salt Lake City and which reached Fort Kearny around July 1.



Figure 7-6. Letter postmarked at Fort Kearny O.R. (Oregon Route) on June 22, 1852 and carried under the Woodson contract to Independence.

### Magraw Contract, 1854 to 1856

The replacement contract route for the Salt Lake City-Independence mail service was designated Route 8911, but was in all material aspects unchanged from Route 4965. On May 10, 1854, the Post Office Department selected the proposal from William Magraw and John Reeside, effective July 1. Trips were monthly, leaving Salt Lake City and Independence on the first of each month, and arriving on the last day of each month.

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The contractors made the necessary investments in livestock and twelve way stations, and began operations optimistically. Unfortunately for them, Fort Laramie's Lieutenant Richard Grattan of the 6<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry led 29 soldiers from Company G into a conflict with Indian tribes that wiped out his command on August 19, 1854. The "Grattan Massacre" ignited full conflict with the Plains Indians along the Independence-Salt Lake Citymail route from Fort Kearny to South Pass. Way stations were attacked and destroyed, and at least one mail party was attacked. Unable to fully protect trading posts and the mail way stations, General William Harney ordered their abandonment on September 18, 1855. The loss of the way stations and the increased need for security with the mail parties created a large financial burden on Magraw and Reeside, so they petitioned the U.S. Government for relief. Accordingly, additional compensation was granted to the contractors and their contract was annulled on August 18, 1856, effective November 30.

Much of the mail carried under this contract was routed via Los Angeles, as was the case with Route 4965. The contractor for the Salt Lake-California route, George Chorpenning, presented claims to Congress for having carried much of the Salt Lake City-Independence mail. He asserted that he carried all or a portion of the westbound Magraw mails in July 1855, February-May 1856, and July-August 1856. He also claimed to carry eastbound Magraw mails of January 1855, July 1855 and February 1856.

Magraw's performance was no better than Woodson's during 1850-54. Fewer than a third of the trips for which there is sufficient information were performed within the 30-day contractual period. Figure 7-7 shows a September 1855 letter from Salt Lake City to Scotland.



**Figure 7-7. Letter postmarked at Salt Lake City on September 1, 1855 and carried under the Magraw contract to Independence.**

This letter was prepaid the 24 cents rate to Great Britain in cash and postmarked with the new style of circular "Salt Lake City Utah T." (Utah Territory) postmark on September 1, 1855. The September mail left Salt Lake City that day and arrived in Independence around September 30. This letter was then carried by steamboat to St Louis and by train to New York, where it caught the American Collins Line steamer *Pacific*, departing on October 17 and arriving in Liverpool on October 28. In confirmation of this, the letter was marked "Paid in America Liverpool 28 OC 55," and sent onward to Scotland. The red "3" is the U.S. credit to England for their internal postage.

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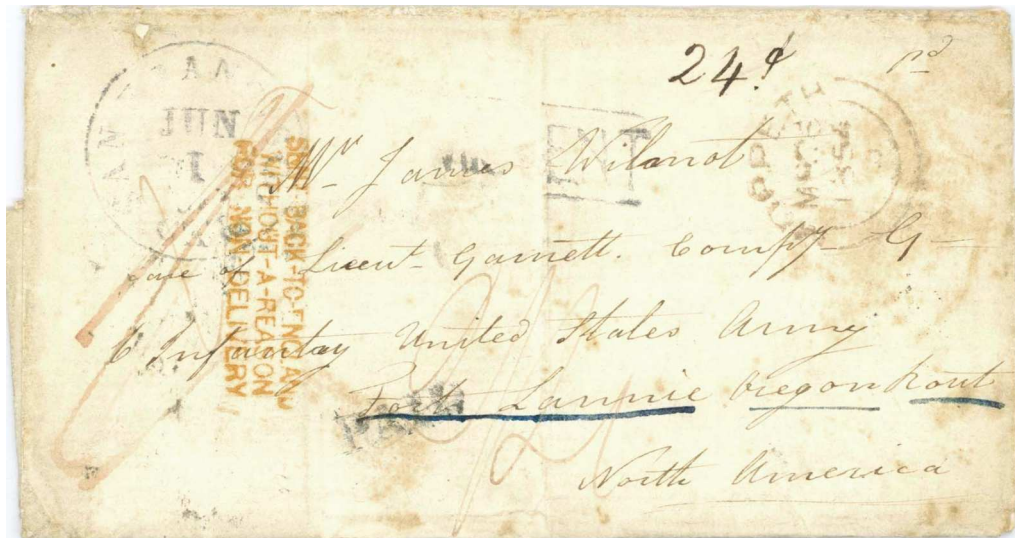
Figure 7-8 shows a January 1855 letter from Salt Lake City that was routed via Los Angeles. This letter was endorsed “via California” and postmarked at the Salt Lake City post office on January 5, 1855. It was franked at a phantom rate of nine cents by a three cents Nesbitt stamped envelope and a pair of 1851 three cents stamps. The Salt Lake City postmaster apparently based his rate calculation on the three cents rate to California (under three thousand miles) plus the six cents transcontinental rate from California to New Jersey. It was given to the Chorpenning mail carrier who left on January 5 and arrived in Los Angeles about thirty days later. It was then taken by coastal steamship to San Francisco, where it caught the Pacific



**Figure 7-8. Letter postmarked at Salt Lake City on January 5, 1855 and directed to the Chorpenning California route because the Independence route was closed by snow.**

Mail Steamship Co. steamer *Golden Age*, which departed on February 16 and arrived in Panama on March 2. After crossing the Isthmus of Panama by train, it caught the United States Mail Steamship Co. steamer *Illinois* to New York on March 12. By contrast, Magraw’s letter carrier left Salt Lake City on January 2, but returned on January 18, reporting that the trail was too unsafe for travel.

Figure 7-9 shows an extraordinary cover carried in part by Magraw to a soldier in Company G of the 6<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry at Fort Laramie.



**Figure 7-9. Letter posted on March 26, 1854 in Morpeth, England and mis-directed to Oregon. It was carried to Fort Laramie via Salt Lake City.**

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This letter was initially prepaid one shilling (the correct rate via Liverpool to New York) at Morpeth, England on March 26, 1854, but was stopped at Liverpool where a clerk made the mistaken judgement that it was addressed to Oregon. All Oregon mail was to be sent by Royal Mail Steam Packets (RMSP) from Southampton to Panama, but the cost on that route was two shillings four pence. Accordingly, the letter was returned to Morpeth for the additional one shilling four pence and then routed to the RMSP steamer *Magdalena*, which left on April 3 and arrived in St Thomas on April 18. The RMSP branch steamer *Clyde* then took the letter to Chagres, New Granada on April 24. After crossing the Isthmus of Panama, it was carried by the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. steamer *John L. Stephens* to San Francisco on May 16. It was then transferred in a closed mailbag to Oregon, where the mistaken routing was noticed and the letter was returned to San Francisco, receiving the rare boxed "Missent" marking.

The San Francisco postmark was dated for the June 1 departure of the Chorpenning mail to Salt Lake City. The latter apparently missed the July 8 Magraw trip from Salt Lake City to Independence, but did connect with the next Magraw trip, which left on August 1 and arrived at Fort Laramie around August 13. At that time, Company G was away from the fort with Lieutenant Grattan on its fateful mission with the Plains Indians and, as noted above, was wiped out on August 19. The addressee of this letter must have been with that group, since the letter bears a final English marking, "Sent Back to England Without a Reason for Non-Delivery."

### **Kimball Contract, 1857 to 1857**

The annulment of the Magraw contract caused the Post Office Department to once again solicit proposals for Route 8911, this time for December 1, 1856 to November 30, 1860. On October 16, it accepted the bid from Hiram Kimball of Salt Lake City for monthly service between Salt Lake City and Independence. Trips were to leave from Independence on the first of each month and from Salt Lake City on the second of each month. All trips were to arrive at their destination by the last day of each month, in about 30 days.

Kimball was required to accept the contract by December 1, but the Post Office Department chose to send his contract by the overland mails. At that time, the mails to Salt Lake City were severely disrupted. The November 1856 mail from Independence (which included the Kimball contract) was held at the Platte River Bridge over the winter, and did not arrive in Salt Lake City until March 24, 1857. Ironically, Kimball learned that he had been awarded the contract on January 6, 1857 by letter via Los Angeles. Accordingly, he commenced his service in February, even though he still had not received the actual contract. Nonetheless, he had not conformed to the requirements of the bid (through no fault of his own), and a rising tide of ant-Mormonism prompted the Post Office Department to annul his award on June 24, 1857. Notice of this was received in Salt Lake City sometime in July.

Prior to Kimball's commencement of service, the Salt Lake City postmaster was forced into stopgap measures. He hired Feramorz Little and Ephraim Hanks to carry the November-December 1856 mails for single trip compensation of \$1,500. They left on December 10 and, after a difficult 79-day trip through the mountain snows, arrived at Independence on February 27, 1857. The Salt Lake postmaster then contracted with John Kerr for the January mails, but he was forced to return to Salt Lake City, so much of the eastbound mail was forwarded via California. The Independence postmaster faced an even larger problem with the westbound mails since there were no Kimball mail carriers in Independence. He sent the May mail to Fort Laramie with John Murdock, who delivered it to O.P. Rockwell for onward transmission to Salt Lake City. Little and Hanks then took the June mail on their return trip to Salt Lake City. Kimball was ultimately granted compensation for five half trips from Salt Lake City to Independence from February to June 1857, but was not recognized for two successful westbound trips.



Very little mail is known from this period. Figure 7-10 illustrates a November 1856 Salt Lake City letter carried by Feramorz Little and Ephraim Hanks. This letter was prepaid the 24 cents rate to England by a pair of 1851 issue 12 cents stamps on November 1, 1856 in Salt Lake City. It was carried in the arduous Feramorz Little overland mail to Independence, which left Salt Lake City on December 10 and arrived on February 27.



Figure 7-10. Letter postmarked at Salt Lake City on November 1, 1856 and carried by Feramorz Little through the mountain snows to Independence.

It took about two weeks' to reach New York from Independence, so this letter missed the March 14 sailing of the American Collins Line steamer *Ericsson*. The next American packet sailing was on April 4, so

the letter was postmarked in New York on that day, and was directed to the American Havre Line steamer *Arago*, which arrived in Southampton, England on April 17. New York marked the letter for a 3 cents credit to England for their inland postage, and England marked the letter "U.S. Pkt" to indicate that it was paid only to England. It was then forwarded unpaid via Belgium and Prussia to St Petersburg, Russia. England collected 4 pence transit postage through a debit to Prussia (not marked), and the Aachen exchange office marked it for a double-weight 14 silbergroschen (8sgr due to England plus 6sgr Prussian transit) debit to Russia. 14sgr was equivalent to 46 Russian kopeks, so a Russian clerk marked the letter for 66 kopeks due (the 46 kopeks for Prussia plus 20 kopeks internal postage) on the reverse, and sent it to St Petersburg, where it arrived on April 13 (April 25 Gregorian calendar).<sup>3</sup>

Figure 7-11 shows a January 1857 letter from Salt Lake City to England.

This letter was endorsed "via California" and prepaid the 29 cents West Coast rate to England on January 2, 1857 in Salt Lake City. Had it been sent via Independence, the rate would have been 24

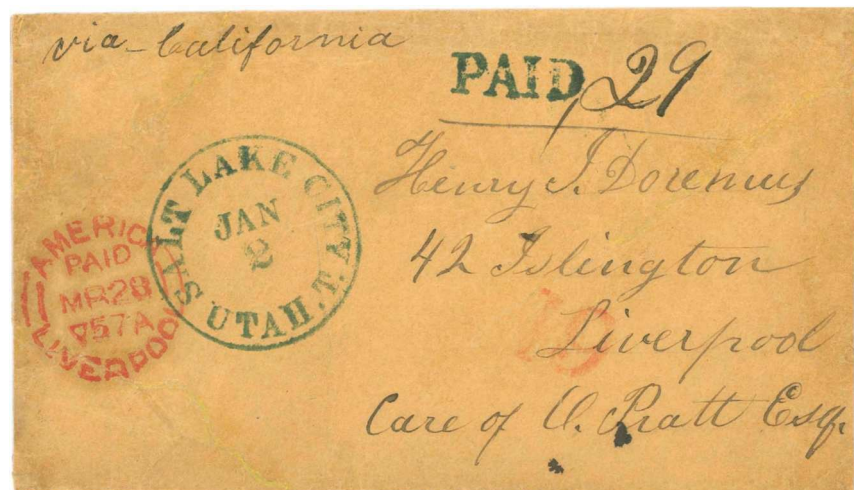


Figure 7-11. Letter postmarked at Salt Lake City on January 2, 1857 and directed to the California route because of delays on the Independence route.

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cents, as in Figure 7-10. It was taken by the Chorpenning mail carrier on the Old Spanish Trail to Los Angeles, where it arrived around February 1. It was then taken by coastal steamer to San Francisco, where it caught the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. steamer *John L. Stephens*, departing on February 20 and arriving at Panama City on March 5. After crossing the Isthmus of Panama to Aspinwall, the letter caught the U.S. Mail Steamship Co. steamer *George Law* to New York on March 16. The New York foreign mail office directed the letter to the British Cunard steamer *Persia* so it credited England with 19 cents, representing 16 cents packet postage and three cents British inland postage. The *Persia* left New York on March 18 and arrived in Liverpool on March 28, where the letter was struck with the red “America Paid Liverpool” postmark of that date.

Meanwhile, the Utah Expedition of 1857-58 was brewing. Federal troops began to gather at Fort Leavenworth in May 1857 to suppress a perceived Mormon rebellion. The first troops left Fort Leavenworth for Utah Territory on July 18, 1857 and their movement was known in Salt Lake City within a week. The Mormons organized for the defense of their territory, burning Fort Bridger in early October 1857 and evacuating Salt Lake City from May 10 to June 30, 1858. Prevented by heavy snows from reaching Salt Lake City, the Federals wintered from December 1857 to March 1858 at Camp Scott, which was built near the site of the destroyed Fort Bridger. The war was ended by negotiation in June 1858, and the Federal troops moved through Salt Lake City to Camp Floyd, about 50 miles southwest of Salt Lake City. This expedition interrupted direct mail communications between Missouri and Salt Lake City from July 1857 to June 1858.

### Miles Contract, 1857 to 1858

The Post Office Department turned to underbidders to fulfill the unfinished portion of the Kimball contract, selecting Stephen B. Miles under similar terms as in the Kimball contract. He was to begin service on October 1, 1857 and the contract was scheduled to terminate on June 30, 1858.

The Utah Expedition played havoc with Miles’ mail contract. All mail to Salt Lake City after June 1857 was diverted to Camp Scott and delivered to Salt Lake City in June 1858. Also, no mail from Salt Lake City was carried on the Independence route during this period. In the meantime, Miles fulfilled his contract by carrying mails to and from Camp Scott, but was unable to maintain a regular eastbound schedule. The Federal army in Utah had a need for increased communication, so the Post Office Department discontinued Miles’ monthly contract on March 30, 1858 to replace it with a more frequent schedule.

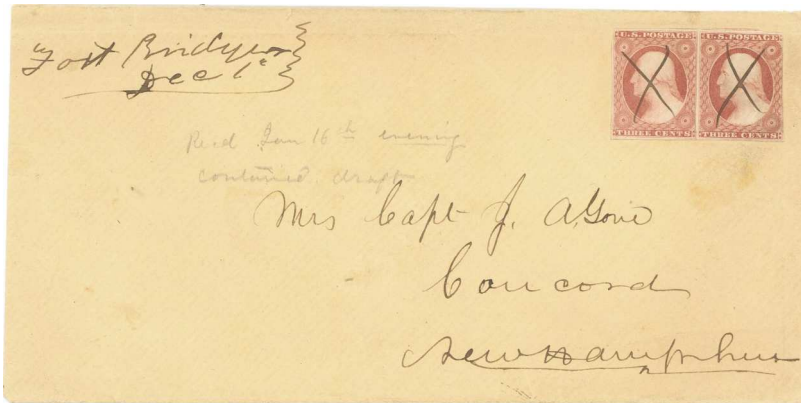
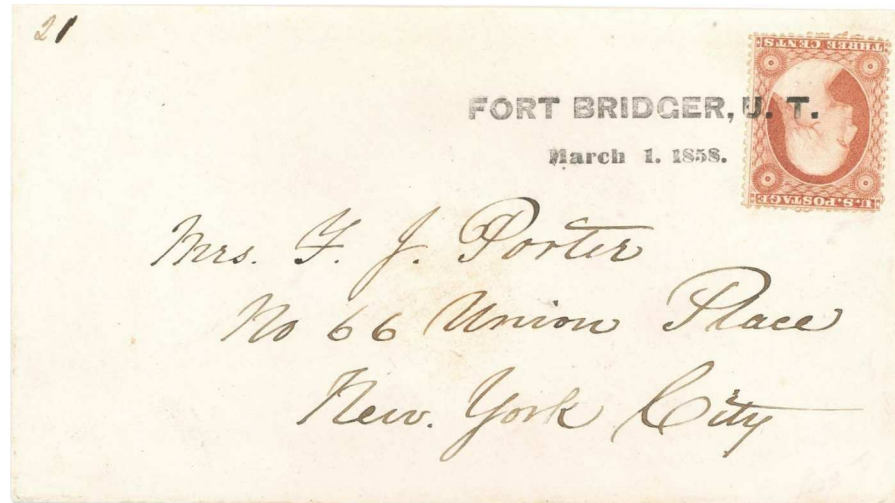


Figure 7-12. Letter postmarked at Fort Bridger, Utah Territory on December 1, 1857 and carried under the Miles contract to Independence.

The newly appointed postmaster for Salt Lake City, Hiram Morrell, accompanied the Federal troops to Utah in 1857, but was prevented from assuming his post in Salt Lake City until June 1858. In the meantime, he established a temporary post office at Camp Scott, and used Fort Bridger postmarks.<sup>4</sup> Figure 7-12 shows a December 1857 example.

This letter received the provisional manuscript Fort Bridger postmark on December 1, 1857 and was prepaid the double-weight rate to New Hampshire by a pair of 1851 issue three cents stamps. It was sent by Captain Jesse Augustus Gove of the 10<sup>th</sup> U.S. Infantry at Camp Scott, and was docketed as received in New Hampshire on January 16, 1858. Gove later became Colonel of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment during the Civil War, and was killed in action at Gaine's Mill on June 27, 1862.

The Fort Bridger manuscript postmark was replaced by a provisional straight-line postmark in early 1858. Figure 7-13 shows an example to New York City. This letter, from Captain (and Adjutant to Colonel



**Figure 7-13. Letter postmarked at Fort Bridger U.T. on March 1, 1858 and carried under the Miles contract to Independence.**

Albert Sidney Johnson) Fitz John Porter was prepaid with an 1857 issue three cents stamp and postmarked on March 1, 1858. It was carried in Miles' last mail to Independence. Porter later commanded the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps of the Army of the Potomac during the battles of Second Manassas and Antietam during the Civil War.

### **Hockaday/COC&PP Contract, 1858 to 1861**

Departing from the normal procedure of advertising for route proposals, the Post Office Department opened direct negotiations with John Hockaday for a weekly mail service between St Joseph, Missouri and Salt Lake City. On April 8, 1858, Hockaday signed a two and a half year contract for a service leaving each Saturday morning from St Joseph and Salt Lake City, effective May 1. Trips were to take 22 days each way. St Joseph was chosen as the new eastern terminus for Route 8911 because of the impending completion of the Hannibal-St Joseph railroad. Construction was underway from each endpoint and stagecoaches ran between the railheads until the February 13, 1859 completion of the railroad. This reduced the transit time between St Joseph and the East by as much as five days.

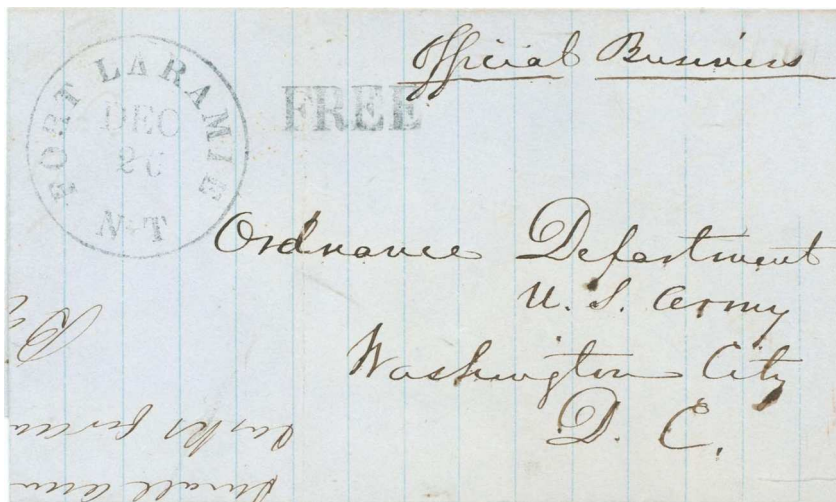
James Bromley carried the first mail from St Joseph on Saturday, May 1, 1858 and arrived at Camp Scott, Utah (the temporary western terminus of the mail line) on May 27. He left with the first eastbound mail on May 29. Regular weekly service began on May 22, and Salt Lake City replaced the Camp Scott terminus in late June 1858.

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In 1859, the Post Office Department began considering less frequent service on this route to reduce expenses, and ordered a reduction to semi-monthly service, effective July 1. Departures were adjusted to every other Tuesday from St Joseph and every other Friday from Salt Lake City. Contractual transit time remained at 22 days. In response, Hockaday sold his interest in the mail contract on May 15, 1859 to the Leavenworth & Pikes Peak Express Company (LPPE). Following the failure of the LPPE, the contract was transferred in February 1860 to the Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Co. (COC&PP), which had absorbed the assets of the LPPE. In all significant respects, the operation of the mail route remained unchanged during these transitions. In fact, it continued to operate under the Hockaday & Smoot name to avoid conflict with the LPPE express business. The Post Office Department did not acknowledge the transfer to the COC&PP until November 6, 1860. When the COC&PP contract for Route 8911 expired on November 30, 1860, the Post Office Department extended it indefinitely, leaving any final decisions to the new Postmaster General in the Lincoln administration. This interim solution persisted until July 1, 1861 when the daily overland contract mail service began running on the Central Route. At that point, Route 8911 ceased to exist.

Not much Hockaday contract mail has survived, due to the short duration of the contract and the diversion of virtually all through transcontinental overland mail to the Butterfield southern route. Figure 7-14 shows a December 1858 example from Fort Laramie to Washington, D.C.



**Figure 7-14. Letter postmarked at Fort Laramie N.T. (Nebraska Territory) on December 26, 1858 and carried under the Hockaday contract to St Joseph.**

This letter is datelined “Fort Laramie Neb. Terr. 26 Dec 58”<sup>s</sup> and was written by First Lieutenant George Hazzard of the U.S. 4<sup>th</sup> Artillery. Endorsed “Official Business” it was sent free of postage to Washington, D.C. per the Fort Laramie “FREE” marking. The Hockaday mail carrier departed from Salt Lake City on Saturday, December 25 and travelled via Fort Laramie to St Joseph around January 15. Hazzard later became Colonel of the 37<sup>th</sup> Indiana Volunteers during the Civil War, and died of wounds received during the June 1862 Battle of White Oak Swamp.

Figure 7-15 illustrates a July 1860 letter from Salt Lake City to England. This letter was postmarked in Salt Lake City for the Friday July 6, 1860 COC&PP departure to St Joseph. A black “24” restated the unpaid rate to England via St Joseph. It reached St Joseph around July 26, and was sent by train to New York. The New York postmark, with a three cents debit to England, was dated for the August 1 departure of the Cunard Line steamship *Africa*, which arrived in Liverpool on August 11. Liverpool postmarked it on August 12 and rated it for one shilling due. With a 37-day transit to Liverpool, this letter shows how efficient communications had become by this time.



Figure 7-15. Letter postmarked at Salt Lake City U.T. (Utah Territory) on July 6, 1860 and carried under the COC&PP contract to St Joseph.

Westbound mail is particularly scarce. Figure 7-16 shows a December 1859 letter to California. This letter was posted on the upper peninsula of Michigan at Lincoln on December 22, 1859. It was endorsed

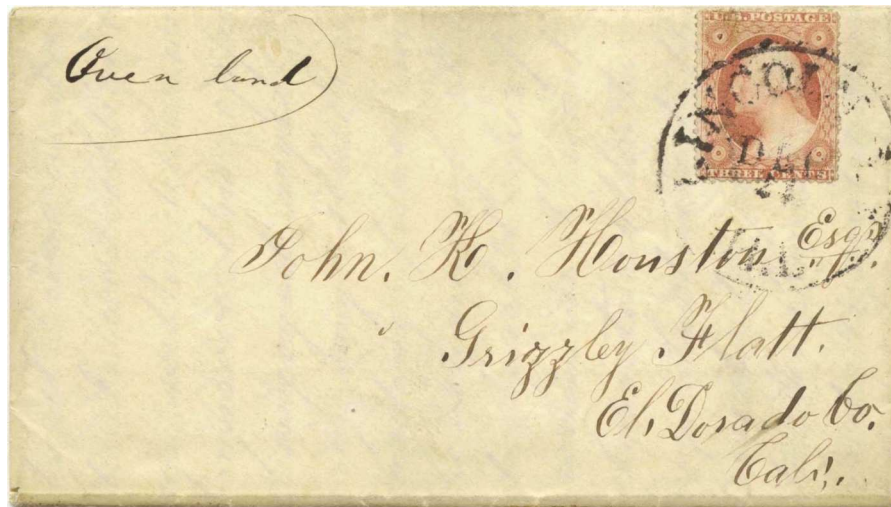


Figure 7-16. Letter posted in Lincoln, Michigan on December 22, 1859 and carried under the LPPE contract to Salt Lake City and then by Chorpenning to California.

“Overland” and prepaid with an 1857 issue three cents stamp for a distance of less than 3,000 miles. The distance by the Butterfield southern overland route was greater than 3,000 miles, so this letter was routed via St Louis to St Joseph for the LPPE mail which left on Tuesday, January 3 and arrived in Salt Lake City around January 25. In Salt Lake City, it connected with the bi-weekly Chorpenning coach which left on Wednesday, February 1 and arrived in Placerville around February 10.

## Contract Route between Salt Lake City and California

Given the two months needed to communicate with the West Coast and receive a response, the Post Office Department employed special agents to manage its business locally in California and Oregon. In October 1848, the post office sent Special Post Office Agent William Van Voorhies from New York to California. Upon his February 1849 arrival in San Francisco, he began establishing a network of post offices and contract routes to connect them. However, he and his successor, Special Agent Allen, faced a major problem in implementing contract mail routes. The cost of living in California was vastly higher than in the East, so they were not able to secure contractors to carry the mail for the meager pay allowed. Congress, a distant 3,500 miles away, had to approve contracts for all mail routes that produced insufficient revenue to cover their costs. As a result, route contracts in California were held up until Congress approved their advertisement, and news of the successful bidder was relayed back to California. Allen’s successor in 1851, Special Agent James Goggin, apparently arrived with greater authority than his predecessors. As reported in the March 20, 1851 Sacramento *Daily Union*, he solicited proposals for 26 contract mail routes serving California, including the first Salt Lake City contract.<sup>6</sup>

Table 7-2 summarizes the mail contracts between Salt Lake City and California that are described in this chapter. Detailed schedules and many actual trip times for these contracts can be found in Appendix D.

**Table 7-2 – Mail Contracts between Salt Lake City and California, 1851-1861**

Dates of Operation	Contractor	Route No.	California Terminus	Contracted Service
May 3, 1851 to Mar 1 1853	Chorpenning	5066	Sacramento	Monthly in 30 days
Mar 15, 1853 to Jul 15, 1853	Blanchard	5066	Sacramento	Monthly in 30 days
Jul 1, 1853 to Jun 30, 1854	Chorpenning	5066	Sacramento	Monthly in 30 days
Jul 1, 1854 to Jun 30, 1858	Chorpenning	12801	San Diego	Monthly in 28 days
Jul 1, 1858 to May 10, 1860	Chorpenning	12801	Placerville	Weekly in 16 days
Jun 1, 1860 to Jun 30, 1861	COC&PP	12801	Placerville	Twice-monthly in 9 days

### First Chorpenning Contract, 1851 to 1854

Goggin awarded the contract for Route 5066 between Sacramento, California and Salt Lake City to Absalom Woodward and George Chorpenning, Jr. for three years. The contract was for monthly service, leaving on the first of each month from each terminus, and arriving at the opposite terminus on the 30<sup>th</sup> of each month. Although trips were scheduled to begin on May 10, 1851 from Sacramento, Chorpenning left with the first mail on May 3.

From the beginning, the contractors encountered great difficulties in adhering to the schedule. Hostility from Indian tribes along the Humboldt River delayed many trips, and cost the lives of several mail carriers, including Woodward in November 1851. Following Woodward’s death, Chorpenning continued to fulfill the contract alone. In addition, the winter snows in the Sierra Nevada and Goose Creek mountain ranges were often impassible, causing schedule delays and a change in the route. Figure 7-17 shows Chorpenning’s mail route between Sacramento and Salt Lake City, as well as the alternate route via Los Angeles that was used to avoid snow-bound mountains in the winter months.



Figure 7-17. Map of the Chorpensing Route. The main route is in green and the alternate route via Los Angeles is in red.

After several failures to cross the Sierra Nevada Mountains in the December 1851-January 1852 period, Chorpensing carried those mails and the February 1852 mail via Los Angeles and the Old Spanish Trail to Salt Lake City. In all, due to Indian attacks and the severe winter, only one mail was received in Sacramento during the eight months between October 1851 and June 1852, and no mail was received in Salt Lake during the four months between early November 1851 and March 7, 1852. Consequently, Chorpensing's performance against his contract from May 1851 to March 1853 was unacceptable. Fewer than 40% of the trips in with known arrival dates made the journey within the contractual 30-day time. In addition, two mails were lost to Indian attacks and ten had to be re-routed via Los Angeles to reach their destination. Reacting to reports of erratic mail deliveries in Salt Lake City, Postmaster General Hubbard cancelled Chorpensing's contract for non-performance on November 18, 1852. He re-let the contract to William Blanchard on the same day, effective March 15, 1853 to June 30, 1856. Chorpensing learned of this cancellation in January 1853, and immediately left for the East by steamship. Fortunately for him, Special Agent Goggin was also returning at that time, and was able to intercede on Chorpensing's behalf in Washington. Accordingly, Postmaster General James Campbell revoked Blanchard's contract and reinstated Chorpensing, effective July 1, 1853.

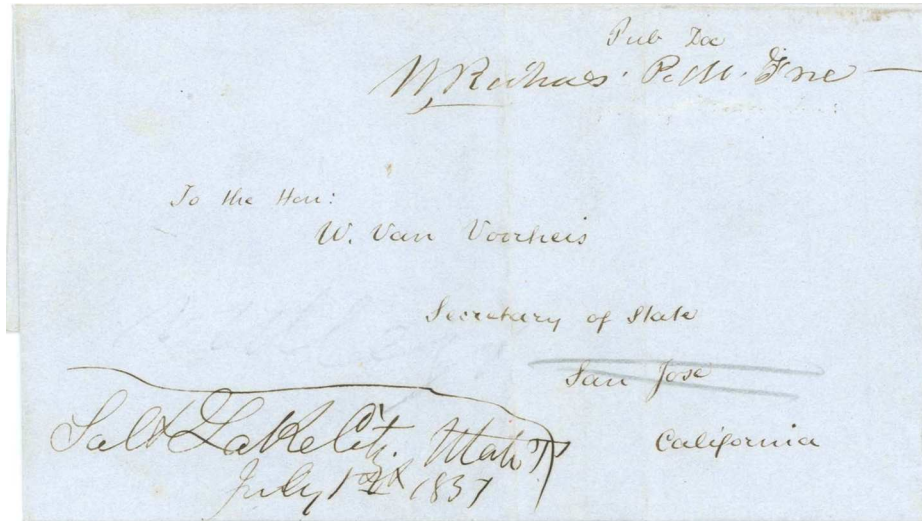
Blanchard's contract was very similar to Chorpensing's annulled contract, except that departures were to take place on the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month. Blanchard's performance against his contract was excellent, but he did not experience the winter months or Indian troubles. His service was recognized by the Post Office Department from March 15 to July 15, 1853.

Chorpensing resumed service under the same terms and conditions as his annulled contract on July 1, 1853. He made even greater use of the alternate Los Angeles route during this period. Although 500 miles longer, the reliability of this route led the Salt Lake City postmaster to compel Chorpensing to carry some of the Independence-Salt Lake mails under a "take and deliver" clause in his contract. According to Chorpensing's later claim for additional compensation, he carried some or all of eight eastbound Independence mails from January 1853 to March 1854.<sup>7</sup> It is likely that Chorpensing's regular California mails that were carried via Los Angeles were shipped by sea to San Francisco from San Pedro (the port of Los Angeles), and that Chorpensing paid for this sea transit out of his contract. The eastbound Salt Lake City-Independence mails carried by Chorpensing were most likely taken to San Diego to connect with eastbound Pacific Mail Steamship Company steamers. However, the Los Angeles route was not always reliable. The normal transit time on that route was about 32 to 35 days but, if a connection was missed in San Pedro, the delay could amount to as much as 20 days.

## 7 - CENTRAL OVERLAND MAIL, 1850-1861

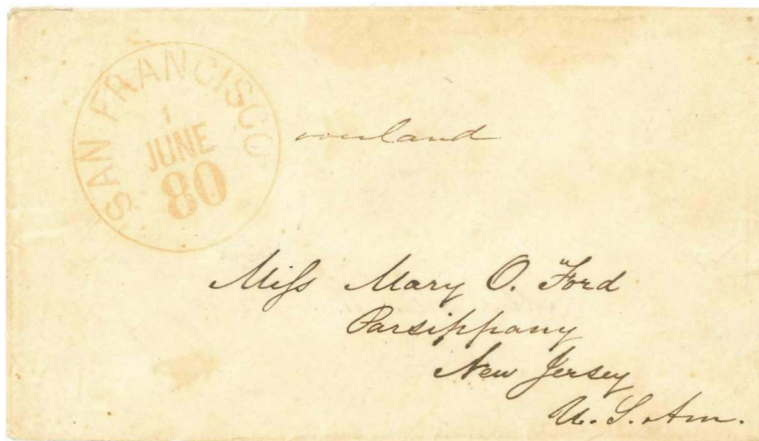
Not much mail was carried by Chorpenning during this period. In responding to his claim for additional compensation, the Post Office Department determined that the regular mail between Sacramento and Salt Lake City never exceeded 150 pounds and was sometimes as little as 75 pounds.

Figure 7-18 shows a letter carried on Chorpenning's first westbound trip. This letter was endorsed for a postal free frank by Willard Richards, postmaster of Salt Lake City, and received a manuscript "Salt Lake



**Figure 7-18. Letter postmarked "Salt Lake City Utah T" on July 1, 1851 and carried on Chorpenning's first westbound contract mail trip to California.**

City Utah T" postmark on July 1, 1851.<sup>8</sup> It was carried on Chorpenning's first westbound contract mail trip, and Indians harassed this mail trip to the extent that the mail party had to seek protection at the fort in Carson Valley until a unit of California militia could escort it to Sacramento. It arrived there around August 3. The postmaster at Sacramento, knowing that the Secretary of State was in Vallejo, directed the letter there, where it was docketed as received on August 4.



**Figure 7-19. April 1851 letter from Hawaii which was routed to the Chorpenning mail route. It connected with the Woodson mail route to Missouri.**

Figure 7-19 shows an April 1851 letter that was directed to Chorpenning's second eastbound trip by the San Francisco postmaster.

This letter is part of a correspondence from the missionary E.K. Whittlesey in Hawaii.<sup>9</sup> A Honolulu forwarder placed this letter on the *Cheerful*, which left Honolulu on May 1, 1851 and arrived in San Francisco on June 1. The twice-monthly PMSS sailing via Panama had left the day before, so the San Francisco postmaster was faced with the choice of holding the letter for two weeks until the next steamship departure or sending it immediately on



the new Chorpenning/Woodson composite overland route via Salt Lake City. He opted for the latter, and endorsed the letter “overland” after rating it for a double-weight 80 cents due. It was postmarked in San Francisco on June 1, and the Woodward mail party left from Sacramento on the next day. They arrived in Salt Lake City on July 2. The Woodson contract mail trip from Salt Lake City to Independence left just after July 2 and arrived in Independence on July 24, so this letter reached New Jersey in early August. Had this letter been held for the next PMSS sailing on June 14, it would have arrived in New Jersey on July 21, or about two weeks earlier than it actually did. This is the earliest known through transcontinental letter sent over the Central Route.

Figure 7-20 shows a May 1852 letter from Tahiti to Salt Lake City via Sacramento. This letter was datelined in the Society Islands on May 5, 1852 and carried by the schooner *Emily Frances*, which left Tahiti on May 26 and arrived in San Francisco on July 15. It entered the U.S. mails at Sacramento, where it was postmarked on August 1 and rated for five cents postage due. Chorpenning’s eastbound mail party left the next day and arrived in Salt Lake City on August 28.



Figure 7-20. May 5, 1852 letter from Tahiti sent via Sacramento on August 1, 1852 and carried by a Chorpenning mail party to Salt Lake City.

## Second Chorpenning Contract, 1854 to 1858

Given the relative success of Chorpenning’s alternate route via southern California, the Post Office Department invited proposals for a year-round contract between Salt Lake City and San Diego, California upon the expiration of Chorpenning’s 1851 contract. San Diego was chosen as the terminus so that PMSS steamers, on their twice-monthly trips between San Francisco and Panama, could carry the mail between San Francisco and San Diego. Chorpenning was again the low bidder for this newly-numbered Route 12801, which called for departures from Salt Lake City and San Diego on the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month, effective July 1, 1854. Contract trip times were 28 days and, since the contract termini were Salt Lake City and San Diego, Chorpenning was no longer responsible for transporting the mail between San Diego and San Francisco.

Since the PMSS steamships had been bypassing San Diego since 1853, the service between San Francisco and San Diego was sub-contracted to the Southern Accommodation Line, which made round trip voyages leaving San Francisco every other Saturday to San Pedro and San Diego. It made little sense to continue using San Diego as an endpoint on the Chorpenning route, so the Post Office Department ordered a

## 7 - CENTRAL OVERLAND MAIL, 1850-1861

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change from San Diego to San Pedro, and moved departures to the first of each month, effective November 1, 1854. The Post Office Department then contracted with the Independent Line to provide weekly mail service between San Francisco and San Pedro. In November, advertisements for the Line began appearing, describing the U.S. mail service leaving San Francisco every Saturday and San Pedro every Friday. However, by March 18, 1856 the *Star* was reporting that:

Under the present mail arrangements with Utah Territory, from two to three hundred pounds of mail matter frequently lies in the Post Office here from two to four weeks, as the mail contractor, instead of waiting for the arrival of the steamer from San Francisco, are obliged to leave here on the first of each month. This is a serious inconvenience to the people of that Territory, and one we think could be easily remedied by altering the time for the departure of the mail from this office.

Apparently in response to complaints like this, the route schedule was altered again. The July 2, 1856 *Deseret News* reported a new schedule departing on the fifth of each month, effective July 5, 1856. Chorpenning ran on that schedule until his contract expired on June 30, 1858. Chorpenning's stagecoaches ran between Salt Lake City and San Bernardino, California (east of Los Angeles). Chorpenning apparently made other arrangements to get the mail between San Bernardino, Los Angeles and San Pedro. Trip times were roughly 23 days between Salt Lake City and San Bernardino, five days between San Bernardino and Los Angeles, and three days between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Overall trip times could obviously be affected by poor connections or obstacles encountered on the trail. In general, his performance against the contract was reported to be excellent. Figure 7-21 shows a November 1855 letter from Hawaii to Utah that was carried by Chorpenning via Los Angeles and San Francisco.



Figure 7-21. November 3, 1855 letter from Hawaii which was carried on the Chorpenning mail route via Los Angeles.

This letter was postmarked in Honolulu on November 3, 1855 and franked with 5 cents Hawaiian postage by an 1853 Boston Engraved issue stamp. It was carried by the American bark *Yankee*, which left Honolulu on November 3 and arrived in San Francisco on December 1. San Francisco rated it “SHIP 5” due, representing the two cents ship fee plus three cents postage to Utah. It was postmarked for the scheduled Saturday, December 1 departure of the California Steam Navigation Company steamer *Senator* with the mails for Los Angeles. The *Senator* left on December 3 and arrived in San Pedro around December 5. The

December Chorpenning mail from Los Angeles (scheduled to depart on December 1) was held until the arrival of this mail, and the mail carrier, David Savage, arrived in Salt Lake City on December 30.

Figure 7-22 shows a February 1856 letter from Salt Lake City to Honolulu. This letter was postmarked in Salt Lake City for the February 1, 1856 departure of the Chorpenning mail to Los Angeles, and prepaid the double-weight three cents rate to California by a six cents Nesbitt envelope. Chorpenning's mail carrier arrived in Los Angeles on February 27. The mail then left San Pedro on the Friday, February 29 Independent Line steamship that arrived in San Francisco around March 3. It was transferred there to the American clipper ship *Resolute* which left on



Figure 7-22. February 1, 1856 letter from Salt Lake City which was carried on the Chorpenning mail route via Los Angeles and San Francisco.

March 25 and arrived in Honolulu on April 14. The letter was docketed as received on that day, and the recipient paid five cents Hawaiian foreign postage (not marked).

When the Post Office Department shifted Chorpenning's contract to the Salt Lake City-Los Angeles route, Carson Valley (on the eastern edge of the Sierra Nevada Mountains) was left without contract mail service. Consequently, the Post Office Department advertised for Route 12573 between Carson Valley and Placerville in 1857.

Figure 7-23 shows a March 1858 example of Carson Valley mail. This letter was posted in Carson Valley U.T. (Utah Territory) on March 29, 1858 with transcontinental postage prepaid by an 1855 10 cents type II stamp. It was carried by "Snowshoe" Thompson over the Sierras to Placerville on April 3, and connected with the PMSS



Figure 7-23. March 28, 1858 letter from Carson Valley carried to Placerville. It was then taken by steamships via Panama to the East.

## 7 - CENTRAL OVERLAND MAIL, 1850-1861

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steamer *John L. Stephens*, which left San Francisco on April 5 and arrived in Panama around April 15. After a trip across the Isthmus, it was carried by the USMSC steamer *Moses Taylor* which left Aspinwall on April 19 and arrived in New York on April 27. It was docketed as received in Middletown, Rhode Island on the next day.

### Third Chorpenning Contract, 1858 to 1860

As Chorpenning's second contract neared expiration, the Post Office Department began to consider a more frequent schedule for Route 12801 and a change back to the more direct Salt Lake City-Placerville route. Chorpenning was the low bidder for a semi-monthly service between Salt Lake City and San Pedro, but this was modified on June 19, 1858 to a weekly service between Salt Lake City and Placerville. Trips were to be made in 16 days or less, with departures from Salt Lake City every Monday and Placerville every Saturday. The first trip left Salt Lake City on Sunday, July 4 and arrived in Placerville on July 19. The first eastbound trip left Placerville on Monday, July 5 and arrived in Salt Lake City on July 21.

The press began to describe the combination of the 16-day Placerville-Salt Lake City segment and the 18-day segment between Salt Lake City and St Joseph as a 34-day transcontinental overland schedule on the Central Route. The two contractors, however, made little effort to synchronize schedules, and coaches often left a day before the arrival of a coach on the other route. Even so, by late 1858 some transcontinental letters began to appear with the directives "overland via Salt Lake" or "overland via Placerville."

Starting in March 1859, the Salt Lake City departures for Placerville were moved to every Tuesday in the interest of better connections between the two routes. The schedule was changed again on May 1, 1859 to weekly departures from Placerville and Salt Lake City on each Wednesday. Around this time, the Post Office Department began to consider a reduction in service on the Salt Lake City-Placerville route. Ultimately, the service was reduced to twice-monthly, effective July 1, 1859. Chorpenning continued to run his coaches weekly, but the finances of his enterprise were significantly impaired by this reduction. Even so, trip times became dramatically less. The Salt Lake newspaper reported regular arrivals from Placerville in nine days, on every other Thursday from July 7 to the end of September 1859. Chorpenning left California in January 1859 to protest the schedule change in Washington, D.C. and never returned, leaving his enterprise and employees to fend for themselves. Meanwhile, operations on his line began to collapse in October 1859 as unpaid employees left, and assets were seized by creditors. On October 12, Chorpenning's agent failed to call for the mail at Placerville, and the Post Office Department used that reason to annul his contract on May 10, 1860.

Figure 7-24 shows a July 1858 eastbound cover from Sacramento to Kansas Territory Governor James W. Denver at Fort Leavenworth. This letter was posted in Sacramento, California in late July 1858 (the date in the postmark is indistinct) and endorsed "via overland mail." Transcontinental postage was prepaid by an 1857 10 cents type III stamp, and the letter was carried by a Chorpenning stagecoach to Salt Lake City, probably leaving Placerville on Saturday, July 31 and arriving in Salt Lake City around August 10. It connected in Salt Lake City with a Hockaday stagecoach, departing on Saturday, August 14 and arriving at Fort Leavenworth around August 22. It was held at the fort until Governor Denver's whereabouts were determined, and then forwarded on September 12 to Leecompton, Kansas with three cents forwarding postage due.

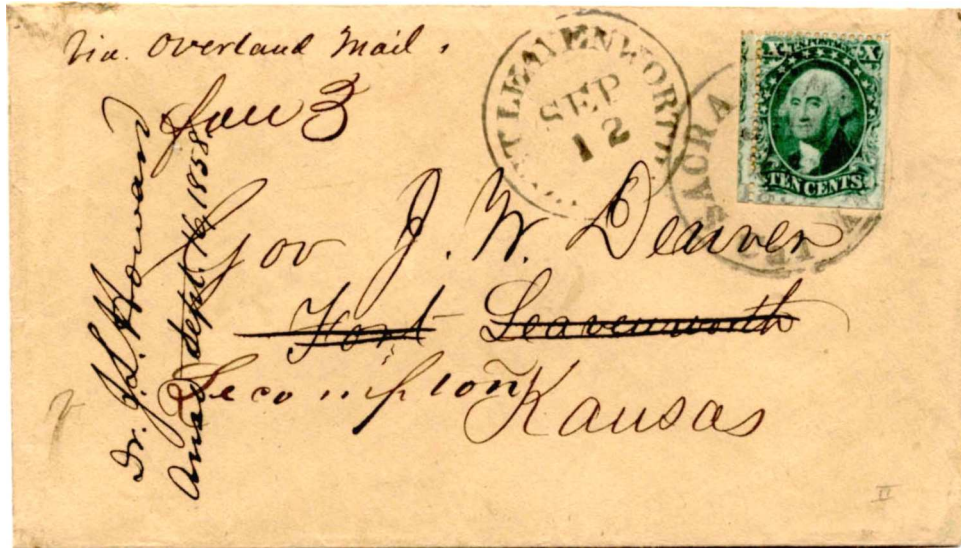


Figure 7-24. July 1858 letter from Sacramento carried by Chorpenning from Placerville to Salt Lake City and by Hockaday to Fort Leavenworth.

Figure 7-25 shows a January 1859 westbound cover from Fort Laramie to California. This letter was posted at Fort Laramie N.T. (Nebraska Territory) on January 12, 1859 and franked 10 cents with three 1857 issue 3 cents type I stamps and an 1857 issue 1 cents type V stamp. Fort Laramie was on the Hockaday route between St Joseph and Salt Lake City, so this letter was picked up in transit by the weekly coach which left St Joseph on Saturday, January 1. It arrived in Salt Lake City around January 20 and connected there with the weekly Chorpenning coach, which left on Monday, January 24 and arrived in Placerville around February 5. It was missent to Benecia, California, and finally forwarded from there on February 7 to San Francisco. The addressee of this letter was Lieutenant James B. McPherson, who later rose to the rank of major-general of the Union Army of the Tennessee, and was the only Union army commander killed in combat during the Civil War.



Figure 7-25. January 12, 1859 letter from Fort Laramie N.T. to San Francisco which was carried by Chorpenning from Salt Lake City to Placerville.

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Figure 7-26 shows an April 1859 westbound letter from Camp Floyd, Utah Territory to Panama. This



letter was initially posted at Camp Floyd, Utah Territory on February 7, 1859 and received the rare manuscript postmark of that date. It was, however, only prepaid three cents, which was insufficient to get it to Panama, so it was held for additional postage. On April 18, the deficiency to 20 cents was paid in cash, and the letter was postmarked again with the new semi-circular Camp Floyd postmark. Endorsed "Via California," it was carried by the weekly

**Figure 7-26.** April 18, 1859 letter from Camp Floyd, Utah Territory to Panama which was carried by Chorpensing from Salt Lake City to Placerville.

Chorpensing stagecoach which left Salt Lake City (northeast of Camp Floyd) on Monday, April 18 and which picked this letter up a day or two later in transit. That stagecoach arrived in Placerville around April 30, and this letter was taken to San Francisco for transport by the PMSS steamer *Golden Gate*, which left on May 5 and arrived in Panama City around May 15. This letter was addressed to the U.S. Consul at Panama City for delivery to the assistant surgeon of the 16-gun sloop-of-war, the USS *Decatur*. Ironically, the *Decatur* had been ordered from Panama to San Francisco on March 23, 1859. Although not marked as forwarded, the letter must have re-traced its path back to San Francisco.

Figure 7-27 shows a June 1859 transcontinental cover with an "Overland, via Placerville" route directive and an illustrated plea for the transcontinental railroad.



This letter was posted in Folsom City, California on June 14, 1859 and prepaid 10 cents postage to Michigan. It left on the weekly Placerville stagecoach on Saturday, June 18 and arrived in Salt Lake City around June 30. On Saturday July 2, it left Salt Lake City on a Leavenworth & Pikes Peak Express Co. (LPPE) twice-monthly stagecoach to St Joseph, arriving there around July 24.

**Figure 7-27.** June 14, 1859 letter from Folsom carried by Chorpensing to Salt Lake City and by the LPPE to St Joseph, Missouri.

A different illustrated railroad propaganda envelope used in October 1859 is shown in Figure 7-28. This letter bears the route directive “Per Overland Mail via Placerville and Salt Lake.” It was posted in San Francisco on October 7, 1859 and prepaid 10 cents transcontinental postage to Virginia. This was part of the October 12 Placerville mail that Chorpenning failed to call for. The Placerville postmaster had the Pioneer Stage Company standing by, and it carried the mail to Salt Lake City around October 21. On Friday, October 21, the letter left Salt Lake City on the twice-monthly LPPE stagecoach to St Joseph, arriving there around November 11.

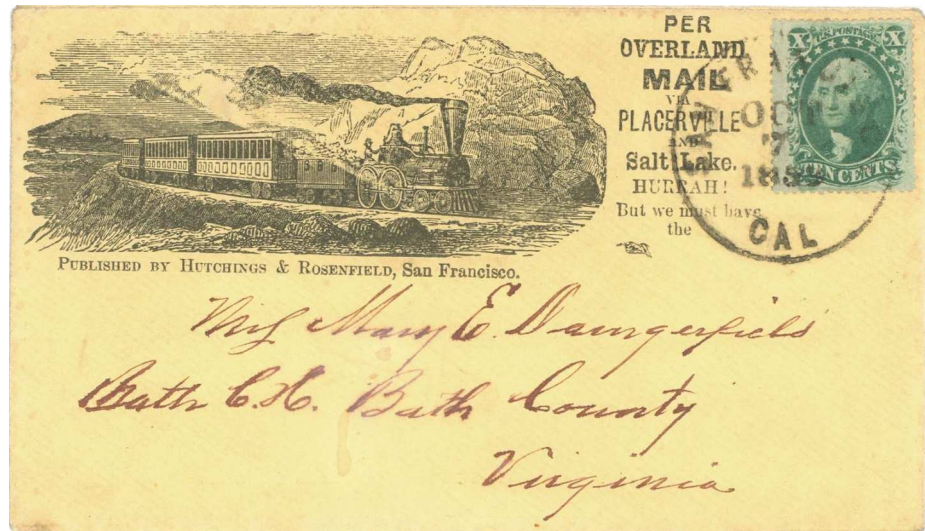


Figure 7-28. October 7, 1859 letter from San Francisco which was carried by Chorpenning to Salt Lake City and by the LPPE to St Joseph, Missouri.

Figure 7-29 shows a December 1859 illustrated stagecoach envelope with route directive “Overland via Placerville & Salt Lake.” This letter was posted on December 21, 1859 in Oroville, California and prepaid 10 cents transcontinental postage to Maine. At this time, the Placerville postmaster was using trip contracts with the Pioneer Stage Company to carry the eastbound mails halfway to Salt Lake City. At a mid-point, they were exchanged with Howard Egan, Chorpenning’s agent on the eastern segment of the line, for further carriage to Salt Lake City. This letter left Placerville on Wednesday, December 28 and arrived at Salt Lake City around January 9, 1860. It connected in Salt Lake City with the LPPE coach, which left on Friday, January 13 and arrived in St Joseph, Missouri around February 4.



Figure 7-29. December 21, 1859 letter from Oroville, California which was carried by Chorpenning to Salt Lake City and by the LPPE to St Joseph, Missouri.

### Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Co. Contract, 1860 to 1861

The Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Company (COC&PP) had gained great fame for running the transcontinental pony express (see Chapter Thirteen) since April 1860, and had previously purchased the Hockaday mail contract between St Joseph and Salt Lake City. It was not surprising, therefore, that Chorpenning's cancelled contract between Salt Lake City and Placerville was re-let without bid to the COC&PP, effective June 1, 1860. This meant that, for the first time, the transcontinental mail contracts along the entire length of the Central Route were in the hands of one party. The two contracts under the control of the COC&PP continued as under the previous contractors:

I. Route 12801: Every other Wednesday westward from Salt Lake City to Placerville and eastward from Placerville to Salt Lake City, both in 9 days.

II. Route 8911: Every other Tuesday westward from St Joseph to Salt Lake City and every other Friday eastward from Salt Lake City to St Joseph, both in 22 days.

The transfer of the Butterfield southern overland mail route to the Central Route meant the cancellation of both COC&PP contracts, effective July 1, 1861. The short duration of the unified contract and the diversion of virtually all transcontinental overland mail to the Butterfield southern route meant that very little mail was carried by the COC&PP under these contracts. Most of the surviving mail is addressed to intermediate points along the Central Route.

Figure 7-30 shows an October 1860 eastbound example. This letter was posted on October 8, 1860 in



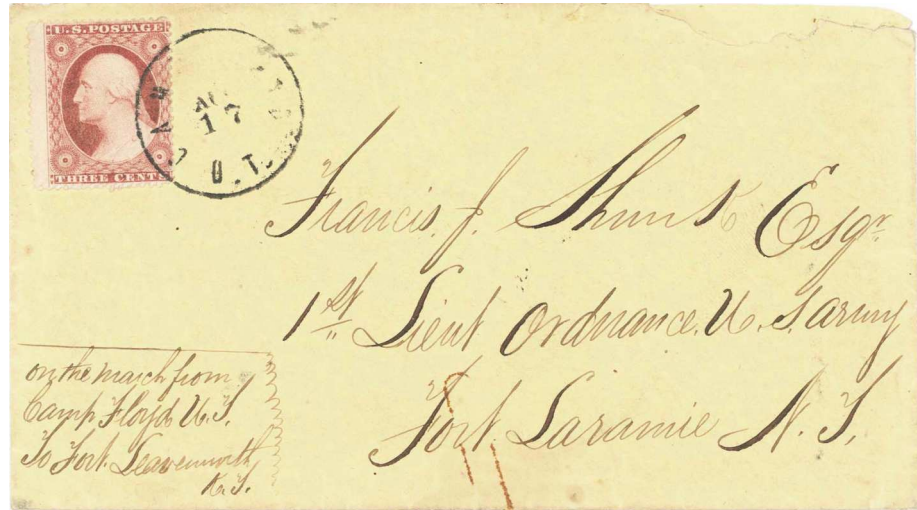
Figure 7-30. October 8, 1860 letter from Georgetown, California to Denver carried by the COC&PP to Julesburg, Colorado.

Georgetown, California and was prepaid 10 cents transcontinental postage to Denver. It was carried on the COC&PP stagecoach that left Placerville on Wednesday, October 10 and arrived in Salt Lake City around October 20. It just missed the October 19 bi-weekly departure from Salt Lake City, and waited for the COC&PP stagecoach that departed on Friday, November 2. It reached Julesburg (in today's Colorado) around November 15, and was transferred to a stagecoach on contract route 15151 from Julesburg to



Denver (see Chapter Twelve for details on this contract). Hinckley & Company's express then collected this letter in Denver on November 26 and delivered it to the gold mines.

Figure 7-31 shows an August 1860 letter carried between intermediate points on the COC&PP routes. This military communication is datelined "Camp Floyd U.T. August 17<sup>th</sup> 1860" and postmarked on the same day. The letter was prepaid with an 1857 issue three cents stamp for the postage to Fort Laramie, and addressed to 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Francis Shunk of the ordinance



**Figure 7-31. Letter postmarked at Camp Floyd U.T. (Utah Territory) on August 17, 1860 and carried under the COC&PP contracts to Fort Laramie, Nebraska**

department. The COC&PP collected the letter on its eastbound trip that left Placerville on Wednesday, August 29 and arrived in Salt Lake City around September 6. It was then transferred to the eastbound stage to St Joseph that left on Friday, September 7 and was delivered in transit at Fort Laramie around September 18.

## Contract Route between Salt Lake City and Oregon

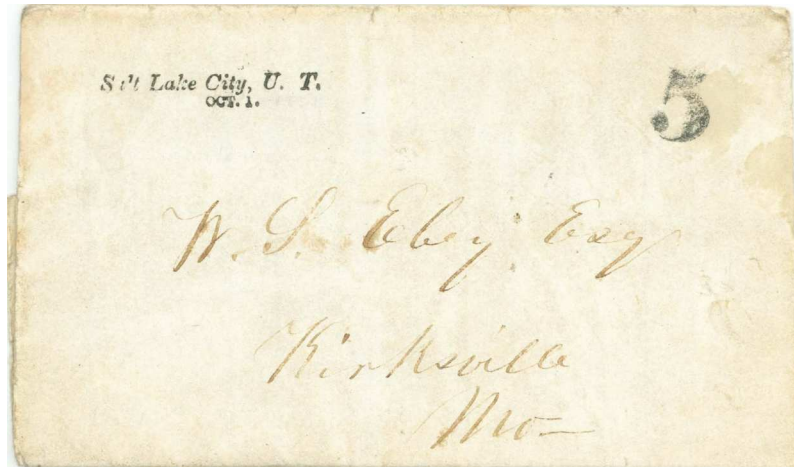
When the Post Office Department first advertised for overland service west of the Missouri River in 1850, they anticipated a route between Independence, Missouri and Oregon City, Oregon via Salt Lake City. They did not, however, receive any proposals for the leg to Oregon City, and settled for a contract between Independence and Salt Lake City (see Woodson contract above). This did not satisfy their desire for a contract route to Oregon, however, so they advertised for Route 5043 between Salt Lake City and The Dalles, Oregon on March 20, 1851.

### Brown & Torrence Contract, 1851 to 1854

The low bid from J.L. Brown and L.G. Torrence was accepted on May 24, 1851, effective July 1. The contract called for a bi-monthly service, leaving Oregon on the first of July and then each alternating month after that, and arriving in Salt Lake City on the 30<sup>th</sup> of the departure month. Because they had no mail carrier in Salt Lake City, westbound service was scheduled to start on August 1, with the same alternating month schedule. Except in the winter months, their performance against their contract was acceptable, as shown in Appendix D.

The June 18, 1853 Salt Lake City *Deseret News* reported that, "The Oregon Mail arrived June 1, most of the papers as wet as water could make them, consequently, most of the matter for the States had to lie over and dry til next mail." This shows that transcontinental letters via Salt Lake City were carried. Even so, very little mail was carried on this route. The December 3, 1853 *Oregon Spectator* complained that, "The mail

## 7 - CENTRAL OVERLAND MAIL, 1850-1861



**Figure 7-32. September 13, 1851 letter from Fort Boise carried by Brown and Torrence via Salt Lake City to Missouri.**

matter from Oregon to the Salt Lake varies in weight from one to three ounces either way! Sometimes two papers and a letter, but mostly one paper is the entire contents of the mail.” Perhaps because of the small mail volumes, the contract was not re-let when it expired on June 30, 1854.

Figure 7-32 shows a September 1851 way letter from Fort Boise to Missouri, via Salt Lake City. This letter was datelined “Fort Boise Sept 13<sup>th</sup> 1851” by a traveler who writes, “I have just

time to drop you a line as the Mail Carrier from the Dalles to Salt Lake waits for me to do so.” The letter was picked up in transit by the September 1851 mail carrier from The Dalles, and arrived in Salt Lake City sometime before October 1. The Salt Lake City post office postmarked it with an italic straight-line postmark on October 1 and rated it for five cents due to Kirksville, Missouri. It was then given to the Woodson mail carrier who left on October 1 and arrived in Independence, Missouri on October 30.

### Endnotes

1. As described at the end of Chapter Five, the Mormons proposed in March 1849 to create the State of Deseret, but were stymied by the creation of the Utah Territory on September 9, 1850. News of this, however, was not received in Salt Lake City until 1851. The few known manuscript “Salt Lake City Deseret” postmarks are known during the November 1850 to June 1851 period.
2. From the establishment of the post office on March 4, 1850 to May 29, 1854 (when it became part of the Nebraska Territory), Fort Laramie was attached to Clackamas County, Oregon for postal administrative purposes. Accordingly, the “O.R.” (Oregon Route) designation in its postmarks reflects this affiliation. Letters addressed to Fort Laramie, Oregon Route were often mis-directed to Oregon.
3. Information on the rates on this letter was received from Richard Winter in a private communication.
4. The old Fort Bridger post office had been discontinued on June 9, 1857 and the post was burned down by the Mormons in October 1857. It was officially re-established on August 5, 1858, although provisional Fort Bridger postmarks had been used at Camp Scott in the intervening period.
5. Nebraska Territory was formed on May 30, 1854 and included Forts Laramie and Kearney.
6. Any questions about the legality of contracts let by the Special Agents were removed by Congressional action on January 13, 1852.
7. Chorpenning asserted that he carried some or all of the eastbound Salt Lake City-Independence mails for January-April 1853, December 1853 and January-March 1854. These mails were carried by Chorpenning from Salt Lake City to California, and then by steamer via Panama to New York.
8. The italic straight-line Salt Lake City postmark (see Figure 7-3) was introduced on July 1, 1851 but the manuscript postmark was also used on that day.

9. Several other letters from the same sender carry Honolulu postmarks, including one dated June 4, 1851 (June 25, 2013 Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, Inc. Sale 1045, lot 10). The letter illustrated here did not pass through the Honolulu post office and therefore did not receive a Honolulu postmark.