

Via Tehuantepec

Chapter Eleven

Mail Via Tehuantepec, 1858-1859

As the September 30, 1859 expiration of the ten-year transcontinental mail contracts via Panama approached, the Post Office Department feverishly experimented with less expensive alternatives. In 1857-58, seven different transcontinental routes were given mail contracts or had their contract terms improved:

- The San Diego-San Antonio overland route contract was signed on June 22, 1857
- The Butterfield overland route contract was signed on September 16, 1857
- The Missouri-Salt Lake City overland route contract was upgraded to weekly on April 8, 1858
- The Neosho, Missouri-Albuquerque overland route contract was signed on May 27, 1858
- The Kansas City-Stockton overland route contract was signed on May 28, 1858
- The Tehuantepec route contract was signed on June 8, 1858
- The Placerville-Salt Lake City overland route contract was upgraded to weekly on June 19, 1858

With the exception of the Butterfield contract, all of these contracts were terminated or significantly cut back by the end of 1859. This chapter describes the background and operation of the Tehuantepec route contract, which was one of the contracts not renewed in 1859.

The Route via Tehuantepec

In the search for an easy and inexpensive route between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec had long attracted much attention. The Isthmus forms a narrow neck between two ranges of the Sierra Madre Mountains and abuts the Gulf of Mexico at its northern extremity, with easy access to New Orleans. This route, roughly four thousand miles in length, is about two thousand miles shorter than the Panama route (described in Chapter Six). Figure 11-1 shows the route.



Figure 11-1. Map of the route via Tehuantepec, Mexico.

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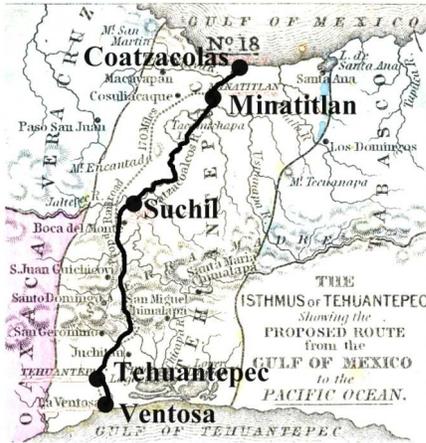


Figure 11-2. Detailed map of the route across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

Starting in the East, this route required a steamship trip across the Gulf of Mexico from New Orleans to the Mexican port city of Coatzacoalcos and then 20 miles up the navigable Coatzacoalcos River to Minatitlan. A shallow draft steamer was then used to travel about ninety miles farther up the river to Suchil, where mail and passengers were transferred to stagecoaches for the 110-mile overland trip via Tehuantepec to Ventosa on the Pacific Ocean. From Acapulco - a short steamship hop from Ventosa - the twice-monthly Pacific Mail Steamship Co. (PMSS) steamships provided the final leg of the trip to San Francisco. Westbound trips followed the same itinerary in the opposite direction. Figure 11-2 shows a detailed map of the Isthmus, laying out the transfer points.

Early Interest in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec

Mexico's grand vision for the Isthmus contemplated a railroad linking the two coasts. In 1842, Mexican President Santa Ana awarded a grant to José de Garay to construct a canal or railroad across the Isthmus. Lacking funding, De Garay sold his concession, and it ultimately ended up in the hands of Peter A. Hargous of New Orleans on February 5, 1849. At this time, the California gold rush was just gathering steam, so Hargous saw an opportunity to provide an alternate route for the emigrant traffic to San Francisco. He organized the New Orleans Company, which undertook a survey of the Isthmus route and placed the steamship *Alabama* on the route across the Gulf of Mexico between New Orleans and Minatitlan. The *Alabama's* first trip left New Orleans on December 10, 1850 and reached Vera Cruz on December 16. It then continued for 235 miles along the coast and up the river to Suchil via Minatitlan. Passengers then took mules for the remaining 110 miles to Ventosa, where they had to arrange for a ship to San Francisco. The *Alabama* made five more round trips until May 22, 1851, when Mexico revoked the Garay concession for fear that American interests would colonize the transit.

A chronic shortage of funds caused the Mexican government to re-instate the Tehuantepec concession in February 1853. Albert G. Sloo¹ was the successful bidder, and proposed to carry the U.S. mails via Tehuantepec in conformity with the March 3, 1853 Post Office Appropriations Bill, which called for a mail route across the Isthmus. This was rejected by the Post Office Department as too expensive, so Sloo was unable to proceed with his concession. The U.S. Government finally took steps to assure the right of transit in the December 30, 1853 Gadsden Treaty², which obtained a perpetual right-of-way across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec for U.S. mails in closed letter bags.



James Gadsden, Diplomat and Soldier, 1788-1858

- Born in South Carolina
- Received degree from Yale College in 1806
- Rose to rank of Colonel in U.S. Army, 1812-23
- President of South Carolina Railroad, 1840-50
- Appointed Minister to Mexico and negotiated the Gadsden Purchase in 1853

Congress then took more definitive action, authorizing a contract route between New Orleans and San Francisco via the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in the March 3, 1855 Postal Act. The Post Office Department advertised for bids in the spring of 1856, but received no responses. After the route was

re-advertised in December 1857, the Post Office Department was able to negotiate a satisfactory one-year contract with the Louisiana Tehuantepec Company (LTC) on June 8, 1858. In his 1858 report to Congress, the Postmaster General described the contract for Route 8162:

To convey mails from New Orleans, by Minatitlan, Suchil, Ventosa, and Acapulco, to San Francisco, twice a month, and back, in safe and substantial steamers between New Orleans and Minatitlan; in safe and substantial river steamers between Minatitlan and Suchil, and in post coaches or good covered spring wagons between Suchil and the Pacific; the residue of the route to San Francisco in steamers, the pay to be at the rate of \$286,000 per annum, with the understanding that the mails may be exchanged with the line between Panama and San Francisco, at or near Acapulco, without change of pay; and with the further understanding that the mails may be exchanged with the aforesaid line at Ventosa, or other port within a short distance of that place, at the annual compensation of \$250,000. Service to commence at any time between the first day of October and the first day of November, 1858, and to terminate on the thirtieth day of September, 1859. Each trip to be performed in fifteen days.

The one year contract term was designed to stimulate competition for the October 1, 1859 renewal of the Ocean mail contracts via Panama. The 1859 Postmaster General report to Congress indicated that the actual mail subsidy for the route was at the rate of \$250 thousand per annum, so the LTC opted to connect with the Pacific Mail Steamship Co. (PMSS) steamships at Ventosa, rather than at Acapulco.

The Louisiana Tehuantepec Company Sailing Schedule

The October 27, 1858 New Orleans *Times-Picayune* described the itinerary for westbound mail:

The *Quaker City* forms the first link of the Pacific connection with New Orleans, departing from our wharves regularly on the 12th and 27th of each month. At Minatitlan, the iron steamer Suchil takes its mails and passengers up the Coatzacoalcos to Suchil, eighty-seven miles. From Suchil the trip is made by stages overland, a distance of one hundred and twelve miles, to Ventosa, on the Pacific...The steamer *Oregon*, on the Pacific side of the Isthmus, leaves Ventosa on the 30th inst., with the passengers and mails of the *Quaker City*, for Acapulco, distant thirty-six hours, where steamers of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company coal. Here a connection is formed with the vessels of that line, which perform the service of the Tehuantepec Company from Acapulco to San Francisco.

The steamship leg across the Gulf of Mexico between New Orleans and Minatitlan took three days, while the trip across the Isthmus between Minatitlan and Ventosa took three to four days. The sea trip between Ventosa and Acapulco in the PMSS steamer *Oregon* took slightly more than a day, and the stretch between Acapulco and San Francisco in PMSS steamships took a consistent seven to eight days. With smooth connections, the contract time of fifteen days could be easily accomplished. However, the contract time was never met in the westbound direction, since passengers and mail generally had to wait several days for the connection with the PMSS steamship at Acapulco.

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The first westbound trip left New Orleans on October 27, 1858 and arrived in San Francisco after a trip of eighteen days. Its detailed itinerary was partially described in the November 20, 1858 Marysville *Weekly California Express*.

The steamer *Quaker City* left New Orleans at 8 o'clock A.M. the 27th October, with mail and passengers, and arrived at Minatitlan at 10 o'clock A.M. on the 30th October. Steamer *Suchil* left Minatitlan at 1 o'clock P.M. same day, and arrived at Suchil at 10 o'clock A.M. on the 31st of October. Left Suchil overland, at 12 o'clock same day; arrived at the pass Nisi Conejo at 12 o'clock A.M. 1st of November. At 3 o'clock left pass Nisi Conejo, and arrived at San Jeronimo at 2 o'clock A.M., 2nd November; started from there at 7 o'clock A.M., same day, and arrived at Tehuantepec at half-past 12 o'clock P.M. Same day left for Ventosa at 4 o'clock, and arrived at the latter place at 7 P.M., making time as follows:

New Orleans to Minatitlan.....71 hours
 Minatitlan to Suchil.....21 “
 Suchil to Ventosa.....55 “
 147 hours

Or 6 days and 3 hours

The average duration of the twenty-three westbound trips was nineteen days. Table 11-1 shows the complete westbound sailing schedule.

Table 11-1 Westbound Sailings of the Louisiana Tehuantepec Line

Trip #	Depart New Orleans	LTC Steamer	Arrive Minatitlan	Depart Acapulco	PMSS Steamer	Arrive San Francisco
WT1	Oct 27, 1858	<i>Quaker City</i>	Oct 30, 1858	Nov 7, 1858	<i>Golden Gate</i> ⁴	Nov 14, 1858
WT2	Nov 12, 1858	<i>Quaker City</i>	Nov 15, 1858	Nov 23, 1858	<i>J.L. Stephens</i> ⁵	Dec 1, 1858
WT3	Nov 27, 1858	<i>Quaker City</i>	Nov 30, 1858	Dec 21, 1858	<i>Golden Age</i> ⁶	Dec 28, 1858
WT4	Dec 12, 1858	<i>Quaker City</i>	Dec 15, 1858	Dec 21, 1858	<i>Golden Age</i>	Dec 28, 1858
WT5	Dec 27, 1858	<i>Quaker City</i>	Dec 30, 1858	Jan 6, 1859	<i>Golden Gate</i>	Jan 13, 1859
WT6	Jan 13, 1859	<i>Quaker City</i>	Jan 16, 1859	Jan 22, 1859	<i>J.L. Stephens</i>	Jan 29, 1859
WT7	Jan 28, 1859	<i>Quaker City</i>	Jan 31, 1859*	Feb 21, 1859*	<i>Sonora</i> ⁷	Mar 1, 1859
WT8	Feb 12, 1859	<i>Quaker City</i>	Feb 15, 1859	Feb 21, 1859*	<i>Sonora</i>	Mar 1, 1859
WT9	Feb 26, 1859	<i>Quaker City</i>	Mar 1, 1859	Mar 9, 1859*	<i>J.L. Stephens</i>	Mar 17, 1859
WT10	Mar 12, 1859	<i>Quaker City</i>	Mar 15, 1859	Mar 22, 1859*	<i>Golden Age</i>	Mar 29, 1859
WT11	Mar 27, 1859	<i>Quaker City</i>	Mar 30, 1859	Apr 8, 1859*	<i>Sonora</i>	Apr 17, 1859
WT12	Apr 12, 1859	<i>Coatzacoalcos</i>	Apr 15, 1859	Apr 23, 1859*	<i>J.L. Stephens</i>	May 1, 1859
WT13	Apr 27, 1859	<i>Coatzacoalcos</i>	Apr 30, 1859	May 9, 1859*	<i>Golden Age</i>	May 15, 1859
WT14	May 12, 1859	<i>Coatzacoalcos</i>	May 15, 1859	May 23, 1859*	<i>Sonora</i>	Jun 1, 1859
WT15	May 27, 1859	<i>Coatzacoalcos</i>	May 30, 1859	Jun 7, 1859*	<i>Golden Gate</i>	Jun 13, 1859
WT16	Jun 12, 1859	<i>W.H. Webb</i>	Jun 16, 1859	Jun 23, 1859*	<i>J.L. Stephens</i>	Jul 2, 1859
WT17	Jun 27, 1859	<i>W.H. Webb</i>	Jun 30, 1859	Jul 9, 1859*	<i>Golden Age</i>	Jul 15, 1859

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Trip #	Depart New Orleans	LTC Steamer	Arrive Minatitlan	Depart Acapulco	PMSS Steamer	Arrive San Francisco
WT18	Jul 12, 1859	<i>W.H. Webb</i>	Jul 15, 1859	Jul 21, 1859*	<i>Sonora</i>	Jul 28, 1859
WT19	Jul 27, 1859	<i>Habana</i>	Jul 30, 1859	Aug 7, 1859*	<i>Golden Gate</i>	Aug 13, 1859
WT20	Aug 12, 1859	<i>Habana</i>	Aug 15, 1859	Aug 21, 1859*	<i>Golden Age</i>	Aug 28, 1859
WT21	Aug 27, 1859	<i>Habana</i>	Aug 30, 1859	Sep 7, 1859*	<i>J.L. Stephens</i>	Sep 14, 1859
WT22	Sep 12, 1859	<i>Habana</i>	Sep 15, 1859	Sep 21, 1859*	<i>Sonora</i>	Sep 28, 1859
WT23	Sep 27, 1859	<i>Habana</i>	Sep 30, 1859	Oct 9, 1859*	<i>Golden Age</i>	Oct 16, 1859

* dates are estimates based on an average of six days sea travel from Panama City to Acapulco.

Eastbound trip times were generally faster than westbound times, with an average of seventeen days for the twenty-one complete trips undertaken. Even so, the contract trip time of fifteen days was achieved only three times (trips ET13, ET17 and ET20).

The first eastbound trip left San Francisco on November 5, 1858 and arrived in New Orleans in the respectable time of sixteen days. With respect to the final eastbound trip, the LTC steamship *Habana* was taken off the service on October 2, so the final leg from Minatitlan to New Orleans was performed by a non-contract steamer.⁸ Table 11-2 shows the complete eastbound sailing schedule.

Table 11-2 Eastbound Sailings of the Louisiana Tehuantepec Line

Trip #	Depart San Francisco	PMSS Steamer	Arrive Acapulco	Depart Minatitlan	LTC Steamer	Arrive New Orleans
ET1	Nov 5, 1858	<i>Sonora</i>	Nov 12, 1858*	Nov 17, 1858	<i>Quaker City</i>	Nov 21, 1858
ET2	Nov 20, 1858	<i>Golden Age</i>	Nov 28, 1858*	Dec 4, 1858	<i>Quaker City</i>	Dec 7, 1858
ET3	Dec 6, 1858	<i>Golden Gate</i>	Dec 14, 1858*	Dec 20, 1858	<i>Quaker City</i>	Dec 23, 1858
ET4	Dec 20, 1858	<i>J.L. Stephens</i>	Dec 28, 1858*	Jan 5, 1859	<i>Quaker City</i>	Jan 8, 1859
ET5	Jan 5, 1859	<i>Golden Age</i>	Jan 13, 1859*	Jan 19, 1859	<i>Quaker City</i>	Jan 22, 1859
ET6	Jan 20, 1859	<i>Sonora</i>	Jan 28, 1859*	Feb 3, 1859*	<i>Quaker Citys</i>	Feb 7, 1859
ET7	Feb 5, 1859	<i>J.L. Stephens</i>	Feb 12, 1859*	Feb 18, 1859	<i>Quaker City</i>	Feb 21, 1859
ET8	Feb 19, 1859	<i>Golden Age</i>	Feb 27, 1859	Mar 6, 1859	<i>Quaker City</i>	Mar 9, 1859
ET9	Mar 5, 1859	<i>Sonora</i>	Mar 13, 1859*	Mar 19, 1859	<i>Quaker City</i>	Mar 22, 1859
ET10	Mar 21, 1859	<i>J.L. Stephens</i>	Mar 29, 1859*	Apr 5, 1859	<i>Quaker City</i>	Apr 8, 1859
ET11	Apr 5, 1859	<i>Golden Age</i>	Apr 12, 1859*	Apr 18, 1859	<i>Coatzacoalkosa</i>	Apr 21, 1859
ET12	Apr 20, 1859	<i>Sonora</i>	Apr 28, 1859*	May 4, 1859	<i>Coatzacoalkos</i>	May 7, 1859
ET13	May 5, 1859	<i>Golden Gate</i>	May 12, 1859*	May 18, 1859	<i>Coatzacoalkos</i>	May 20, 1859
ET14	May 20, 1859	<i>J.L. Stephens</i>	May 28, 1859*	Jun 9, 1859	<i>Jasper</i>	Jun 12, 1859
ET15	Jun 6, 1859	<i>Golden Age</i>	Jun 13, 1859*	Jun 19, 1859	<i>W.H. Webb</i>	Jun 22, 1859
ET16	Jun 20, 1859	<i>Sonora</i>	Jun 28, 1859*	Jul 4, 1859	<i>W.H. Webb</i>	Jul 7, 1859
ET17	Jul 6, 1859	<i>Golden Gate</i>	Jul 13, 1859*	Jul 18, 1859	<i>W.H. Webb</i>	Jul 21, 1859
ET18	Jul 20, 1859	<i>Golden Age</i>	Jul 27, 1859*	Aug 2, 1859	<i>Habana</i>	Aug 6, 1859

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Trip #	Depart San Francisco	PMSS Steamer	Arrive Acapulco	Depart Minatitlan	LTC Steamer	Arrive New Orleans
ET19	Aug 5, 1859	<i>J.L. Stephens</i>	Aug 13, 1859 ⁹	Aug 17, 1859	<i>Habana</i>	Aug 21, 1859
ET20	Aug 20, 1859	<i>Sonora</i>	Aug 27, 1859*	Sep 1, 1859	<i>Habana</i>	Sep 4, 1859
ET21	Sep 5, 1859	<i>Golden Age</i>	Sep 12, 1859*	Sep 17, 1859	<i>Habana</i>	Sep 21, 1859
ET22	Sep 20, 1859	<i>J.L. Stephens</i>	Sep 28, 1859			

* dates are estimates based on seven to eight days transit times from San Francisco to Acapulco.

Mail Carried via the Tehuantepec Route, 1858 to 1859

Seven different transcontinental routes were available in 1858, so the “default route” concept was utilized by the Post Office Department to reduce confusion. During the period of the Tehuantepec contract, the contract mail route via Panama was the stated default for post office mail,¹⁰ so if someone wanted to send a letter by an alternate route, that alternate route had to be endorsed on the cover or letter, usually by denoting a terminus or prominent point on the route. This system was clearly explained by the San Francisco postmaster in the November 15, 1858 San Francisco *Daily Alta California* when he announced the start of the new service via Tehuantepec:

Editor Alta: As a matter of public information and general interest, will you please announce in your paper that hereafter I shall dispatch from this office on the 5th and 20th of each month a mail VIA TEHUANTEPEC TO NEW ORLEANS. I am directed by the Postmaster General to request writers of letters destined to places in the Atlantic States, to indorse thereon the route by which they wish them sent, to wit:

“VIA LOS ANGELES OVERLAND”

“VIA SALT LAKE OVERLAND”

“VIA TEHUANTEPEC”

Letters with no such endorsement upon them and all newspapers will be sent “Via Panama”. Three cents will pay the postage on a single letter “Via Overland” as far as Chicago, Ills. and Cincinnati, Ohio. Beyond those points the postage will be 10 cents. Newspapers throughout the state will do the public a favor by inserting this in their columns.

C.L. WELLER, P.M.

This clearly sets out the distinguishing characteristics of letters sent via Tehuantepec. Most importantly, they must bear a “via Tehuantepec” inscription, but they should also carry 10 cents per half ounce in postage, per the April 1, 1855 U.S. postal rates.¹¹



Figure 11-3. Eastbound letter endorsed via Tehuantepec which entered the mails at New Orleans on November 22, 1858.

Figure 11-3 illustrates a letter carried on the first eastbound trip. This 10 cents Nesbitt stamped envelope was endorsed “via Tehuantepec” and placed in the Tehuantepec contract mail at San Francisco on November 5, 1858. Curiously, it was not postmarked at San Francisco, but was still routed to the PMSS steamship *Sonora* which departed on November 5 and arrived in Acapulco around November 12. It was taken by

the PMSS *Oregon* to Ventosa and then carried overland and by river steamer across the Isthmus to meet the LTC steamer *Quaker City* at Minatitlan. The *Quaker City* departed on November 17 and arrived in New Orleans on November 21. This letter was postmarked at New Orleans on the following day, fully paid to its destination.

Just under half of the recorded eastbound covers originated in San Francisco. Most of the remaining covers were posted in northern California towns. Figure 11-4 shows one such cover carried on the 13th eastbound trip. This letter was posted in the gold mining town of Yankee Jims, California on May 4, 1859, endorsed “via Tehuantepec” and prepaid 10 cents transcontinental postage.¹² It was carried by the PMSS steamship



Figure 11-4. Letter postmarked at Yankee Jims, California on May 4, 1859 and carried via San Francisco and Tehuantepec to Vermont.

Golden Gate from San Francisco on May 5, and arrived at Acapulco on May 12.¹³ After a five-day trip across the Isthmus by stagecoach and river steamer, it met the LTC steamer *Coatzacoalcos*, which left Minatitlan on May 18 and arrived in New Orleans on May 20. This trip was one of three accomplished in the contract time of fifteen days.

The 14th eastbound trip was the slowest, at 23 days from San Francisco to New Orleans. Figure 11-5 was carried on that trip.



Figure 11-5. Letter postmarked at San Francisco, California on May 20, 1859 and carried via Tehuantepec to Alabama.

This letter, endorsed “via Tehuantepec,” and was postmarked in San Francisco for the May 20, 1859 departure of the PMSS steamship *John L. Stephens*, and prepaid 10 cents transcontinental postage.¹⁴ It arrived at Acapulco on May 28, where it was transferred to the PMSS *Oregon* for the one day trip to Ventosa.

After crossing the Isthmus to Minatitlan, this letter was delayed for over a week. The LTC steamship *Coatzacoalcos* had been seized by the New Orleans sheriff, so the Louisiana Tehuantepec Company had to

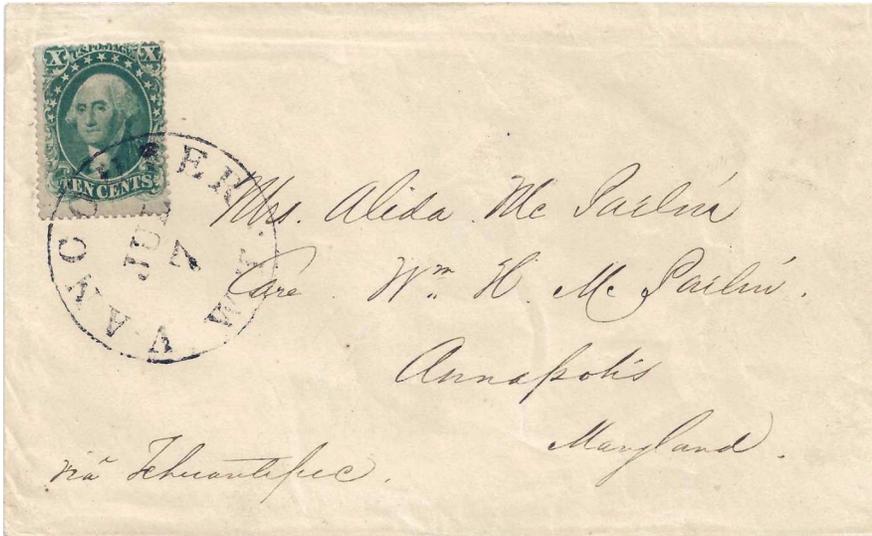


Figure 11-6. Letter posted in Vancouver, Washington Territory on July 7, 1859. Carried via San Francisco and Tehuantepec to Maryland.

scramble for a replacement. It chartered the steamship *Jasper*, which finally left Minatitlan with this mail on June 9 and arrived in New Orleans on June 12.¹⁵ This was the only sailing of the *Jasper* on this route.

News of the new transcontinental route spread far beyond San Francisco, and letters could be endorsed to the route from distant western post offices. Figure 11-6 shows a remarkable example carried on the 18th eastbound trip.

Vancouver, Washington Territory on July 7, 1859, endorsed “via Tehuantepec” and prepaid 10 cents

transcontinental postage.¹⁶ It was carried across the Columbia River to Portland, where it met the PMSS steamship *Pacific*, which left on July 7 and arrived in San Francisco on July 12. It left there on July 20 aboard the PMSS steamship *Golden Age*, which arrived at Acapulco on July 27, where it was transferred to the PMSS *Oregon* for the one day trip to Ventosa. After a five-day trip across the Isthmus by stagecoach and river steamer, it met the LTC steamer *Habana*, which left Minatitlan on August 2 and arrived in New Orleans on August 6. It



Figure 11-7. Letter postmarked at New Orleans on March 11, 1859 and carried via Tehuantepec to San Francisco.

finally arrived in Annapolis around August 10, just over a month after it left the Pacific Northwest.

An unpublished census by Michael Perlman of surviving Tehuantepec route covers contains twenty-four eastbound examples and five westbound covers.¹⁷ This illustrates the great disparity in between eastbound and westbound mail volume on the Tehuantepec route. The reason for this is not completely understood, but it appears that most westbound mail originated around New Orleans, and that the service was not broadly advertised outside of that region.

Figure 11-7 shows a March 1859 cover carried on the tenth westbound trip. This quadruple-weight letter was posted on March 11, 1859 in New Orleans. It was endorsed “via Tehuantepec” and prepaid¹⁸ four times the 10 cents transcontinental rate. It left the following day on the LTC steamship *Quaker City*, which arrived in Minatitlan on March 15. After a trip across the Isthmus by river steamer and stagecoach, it was carried by the PMSS steamer *Oregon* from Ventosa to Acapulco. It left there on March 22 aboard the PMSS steamship *Golden Age*, and arrived in San Francisco on March 29.

Figure 11-8 shows an April 1859 letter that took eighteen days to reach San Francisco on the 13th westbound trip. This letter, endorsed “Mail via Tehuantepec,” was postmarked in New Orleans for the April 27, 1859 departure of the LTC steamship *Coatzacoalcos*, and prepaid 10 cents transcontinental postage.¹⁹ It arrived at Minatitlan on April 30, where it was transferred to the river steamer for the trip to Suchil, and from there by stagecoach to Ventosa. It met the PMSS *Golden Age* at Acapulco on May 9 and arrived in San Francisco on May 15.



Figure 11-8. Letter postmarked at New Orleans on April 27, 1859 and carried via Tehuantepec to Big Bar, California.

End of the Louisiana Tehuantepec Company Mail Contract

In his 1859 report to Congress, the Postmaster General explained why the Tehuantepec contract was not renewed after the first year:

The value of this route is very clearly expressed in its receipts of \$5,276.68, and its annual expenditures of \$250,000. In its present condition, it is comparatively useless, alike for purposes of travel and postal communication.

In total, fewer than 1,000 passengers and only 34,598 letters were carried via Tehuantepec²⁰ during the contract’s eleven months’ duration.

Endnotes

1. Sloo had previously been the successful bidder for the April 20, 1847 mail contract between New York and Chagres, Panama (see Chapter Six for details).
2. The Gadsden Treaty was signed on December 30, 1853 and purchased 30,000 square miles of Mexican territory in today's southern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico for the United States. It was ratified with modifications by the U.S. Senate on April 25, 1854 and finally approved by Mexico on June 8, 1854. The

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perpetual right-of-way across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec contained in the Treaty was relinquished by the United States in 1937. (Conkling, pages 49 and 71-73).

3. The *Oregon* was the second steamship of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. She was active on the San Francisco-Panama run until 1856 and served as a branch steamer after that. She was sold in 1861.

4. On this first westbound trip, the PMSS steamer *Oregon* left Ventosa with the mails on November 6, 1858 and took them to Acapulco. The PMSS *Golden Gate* left Panama City on November 1, collected the *Oregon's* mails during its coaling stop at Acapulco on November 7, and arrived at San Francisco on November 14.

5. The PMSS steamer *Oregon* left Ventosa on November 22, 1858 and took the mails to Acapulco. The PMSS *J.L. Stephens* left Panama City on November 17 and picked up the *Oregon's* mails Acapulco on November 23.

6. There was no early December 1858 PMSS sailing from Panama City, so the December 21 sailing of the *Golden Age* from Acapulco carried both the November 27 and December 12 New Orleans mails.

7. The *Golden Age* brought no Tehuantepec mails to San Francisco on February 12, 1859. A storm in the Gulf of Mexico delayed the mails and the *Oregon* waited at Ventosa until February 3, but was forced to leave before the arrival of the January 28 New Orleans mail. That mail had to wait for the departure of the PMSS steamship *Sonora* from Acapulco on February 21. The *Sonora* also carried the February 12 New Orleans mail to San Francisco from Acapulco. (February 12, 1859 San Francisco *Bulletin*)

8. A letter owned by Floyd Risvold was written at Tehuantepec by Charles Webster, U.S. consul and agent for the LTC, on September 29, 1859. Webster wrote, "The mail will leave in a few moments for Minatitlan and New Orleans, and as the contract with the Tehuantepec Company expires on the first of October, I greatly fear it will be the last direct opportunity I will have for some time." This letter has a New Orleans postmark of October 10, and was rated for 10 cents due as a non-contract incoming steamship letter.

9. The PMSS steamer *Oregon* arrived at Ventosa on the evening of August 14 from Acapulco. The mail and passengers left early next morning for Suchil, but were accosted by a band of armed men six miles from Ventosa. Both the passengers and mail were robbed and sent on their way to Minatitlan, where they caught the *Habana* for New Orleans on August 17. (August 20, 1859 New Orleans *Times-Picayune*)

10. Following the September 30, 1859 expiration of the Panama transcontinental contracts, the Postmaster General ordered on December 17, 1859 that the default route for transcontinental letter mail was overland (on the Butterfield line) rather than by steamship via Panama. This overland default order was announced in California newspapers on January 20, but not implemented in California until January 23.

11. The March 3, 1855 Postal Act changed the transcontinental rates, effective April 1. The July 1851 3,000-mile rate of six cents per half ounce was increased to 10 cents and the unpaid rate was eliminated since the Act required prepayment on all letters. These 1855 rates were slightly modified in 1861 and superseded on July 1, 1863. See Appendix G.

12. The franking is an 1857 issue 10 cents type II stamp.

13. The *Golden Gate* continued on to Panama City, where it arrived on May 17.

14. The franking is an 1857 issue 10 cents type II stamp.

15. The June 13, 1859 New Orleans *Times-Picayune* reported that the "U.S. mail steamship *Jasper*, Capt. Tilly, of the Louisiana Tehuantepec Transit Line, reached her wharf at an early hour yesterday morning. The *Jasper* brings the regular semi-monthly California mail, with dates from San Francisco to the 20th ult."

16. The franking is an 1857 issue 10 cents type I stamp.

17. Three of the eastbound covers originated on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and entered the U.S. mails at New Orleans as steamship letters. Three of the five known westbound covers originated in Louisiana.

18. The franking consists of two vertical pairs of the 1857 issue 10 cents type III stamp.

19. The franking is an 1857 issue 10 cents type III stamp.

20. Coburn, *Letters of Gold*, page 105.