

**Mails of the Westward
Expansion,
1803 to 1861**

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Table of Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>vii</i>
Chapter One: Westward Expansion, 1803-1848	1
1803 Louisiana Purchase	
The Fur Trade Opens Trails into the Louisiana Purchase	
The Fur Trade Moves Westward to the Rockies	
Further Westward Expansion, 1845 to 1848	
Settling the Western Territories	
Early Letter Communications with the West	
Evolution of Postal Communications	
Chapter Two: Santa Fe Trail Mail, 1821-1850	11
The Santa Fe Trail	
The Texan Santa Fe Expedition of 1841	
Kearny's Army of the West, 1846 to 1847	
The Army of the West Captures Santa Fe, 1846	
Kearny Divides the Army of the West, 1846	
The Occupation of Santa Fe	
Chapter Three: Oregon Mails, 1830-1848.	19
The Disputed Oregon Territory	
History of American Interests in the Pacific Northwest	
History of British Interests in the Pacific Northwest	
The Hudson's Bay Company Communication System	
Overview of Oregon Mail Routes before 1849	
Mail via Cape Horn, Direct	
Mail via Cape Horn and California	
Mail via Cape Horn and Hawaii	
Mail via the Mexico Route	
The HBC Overland Brigade Route	
Overland Mails between Missouri and Oregon	
Postal Service of the Provisional Government of Oregon	
The Start of the U.S. Postal Service in Oregon	
Chapter Four: California Mails, 1821-1849	49
Early American Settlement of California	
Early Overland Trips to California	
Emigration Begins to Build, 1843 to 1848	
California Becomes Part of the United States, 1846 to 1848	
Kearny's California Regional Mail Service	
Overview of Transcontinental Mail Routes before 1849	
Mail via Cape Horn, 1821 to 1835	
Mail via Mexico, 1824 to 1846	
Mail via Panama, 1846 to 1849	
Overland Transcontinental Mails	
Military Courier Overland Mail	
Gold Shipments from California	
Private Newspaper Overland Mails to Missouri, 1848	
Other Private Mails, 1848	

Chapter Five: Central Overland Mail, 1847-1850 81

- The Mormon Church Migrates West
- Mail between Salt Lake City and the Missouri River
- The Babbitt Special Contract Mails
- Estill Express
- Trail Mail on the Platte River Road
- Mail between Salt Lake City and California

Chapter Six: Mail Via Panama, 1848-1861 95

- United States Mail Steamship Company Contract
- Pacific Mail Steamship Company Contract
- Transit across the Isthmus of Panama
- Early Contract Period, 1848 to 1851
 - Contract Letters Carried via Panama, 1848 to 1851
 - Mail Agents on Steamships, 1849 to 1852
 - Communications between Europe and the West Coast, 1849 to 1851
 - Contract Mails to and from Oregon, 1849 to 1851
 - Post Office Mails carried by Opposition Steamships, 1849 to 1850
- Middle Contract Period, 1851 to 1855
 - Contract Letters Carried via Panama, 1851 to 1855
 - San Francisco Letter bag Operators, 1853 to 1858
- Late Contract Period, 1855 to 1861
 - Contract Letters Carried via Panama, 1855 to 1859
- End of the 1847 Ocean Mail Contracts in 1859
- Non-Contract Mail via Panama

Chapter Seven: Central Overland Mail, 1850-1861 121

- Contract Route between Salt Lake City and Missouri
 - Woodson Contract, 1850 to 1854
 - Magraw Contract, 1854 to 1856
 - Kimball Contract, 1857
 - Miles Contract, 1857 to 1858
 - Hockaday/COC&PPE Contract, 1858 to 1861
- Contract Route between Salt Lake City and California
 - First Chorpenning Contract, 1851 to 1854
 - Second Chorpenning Contract, 1854 to 1858
 - Third Chorpenning Contract, 1858 to 1860
 - COC&PPE Company Contract, 1860 to 1861
- Contract Route between Salt Lake City and Oregon
 - Brown & Torrence Contract, 1851 to 1854

Chapter Eight: Mail Via Nicaragua, 1851-1857 147

- The Vanderbilt Independent Line and the Accessory Transit Company
- The Walker Filibuster in Nicaragua, 1855 to 1857
- Mail Carried via the Nicaragua Route, 1851 to 1857

Chapter Nine: Southern Overland Mail, 1857-1861	157
Early Communications with Fort Yuma	
“Jackass Mail” Contract Route, 1857 to 1860	
Butterfield Contract Mail Route, 1858 to 1861	
Butterfield Mail Prior to the December 17 Overland Default Order	
Post Office Directive Handstamps Prior to the December 17 Default Order	
Butterfield Mail after the December 17 Overland Default Order	
Post Office Directive Handstamps after the December 17 Default Order	
The End of the Southern Butterfield Mail Route	
Chapter Ten: Santa Fe Contract Mail, 1850-1861	173
The First Mail Contract between Santa Fe and Independence, 1850 to 1854	
The Second Mail Contract between Santa Fe and Independence, 1854 to 1858	
The Third Mail Contract between Santa Fe and Independence, 1858 to 1862	
Contract Mail between Neosho and Albuquerque, 1858 to 1859	
Contract Mail between Kansas City and Stockton, 1858 to 1859	
Chapter Eleven: Mail Via Tehuantepec, 1858-1859	185
The Route via Tehuantepec	
Early Interest in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec	
The Louisiana Tehuantepec Company Sailing Schedule	
Mail Carried via the Tehuantepec Route, 1858 to 1859	
End of the Louisiana Tehuantepec Company Mail Contract	
Chapter Twelve: Colorado Mail Routes, 1858-1861	195
Opening the Pike's Peak Region	
The Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Company	
The Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Company Expands	
The “Phantom” U.S. Mail Contract	
Further Changes with the Leavenworth & Pike's Peak Company	
Further Efforts for a U.S. Contract Mail	
The Only Game in Town	
COC&PPE Takes Over	
Competition Enters the Market	
Chapter Thirteen: Transcontinental Pony Express Mail, 1860-1861 . . .	217
The First Rate Period – April to August 1860	
The Second Rate Period – August 1860 to April 1861	
The Third Rate Period – April to June 1861	
The Fourth Rate Period – July to October 1861	
Appendix A: Rocky Mountain Trip List, 1804 to 1843	235
Appendix B: Oregon Ship Sailings, 1824 to 1848.	241

Appendix C: Via Panama Sailings, 1849 to 1861	249
Appendix D: Central Overland Trip List, 1850 to 1861	275
Appendix E: Via Nicaragua Sailings, 1851 to 1856.	293
Appendix F: Southern Overland Trip List, 1858 to 1861	299
Appendix G: United States Postal Rates (simplified), 1816 to 1861	303
References:	308

Preface

This book was inspired by the research and collection of Floyd E. Risvold, whose extraordinary "American Expansion & the Journey West" postal history collection was sold by Spink Shreve Galleries in January 2010. Floyd epitomized the postal history collector. His collection was formed by the pieces of paper carried by long ago mail systems, but his real passion was the history behind those pieces of paper. In this way, for example, he could bring to life the travails of a pony express rider in 1860. In addition, his generous sharing of his discoveries with other collectors was legendary.

Postal history is the study of postal routes, rates, frankings and markings. The best postal history reference sources are official postal documents and contemporary newspaper reports. However, the official record is invariably incomplete, so the examination of surviving pieces of mail, or covers, from the period can fill in the gaps by showing patterns of postal use. The combination of surviving postal artifacts with postal documentation, historical events and geography can be used to accurately re-create the details of a mail delivery system. This is the approach employed in this book.

The transcontinental mail systems described in this book crossed or touched the Rocky Mountains, either over them or by route around them. As further described in this book, these systems evolved because the restless spirit of the 19th Century American created a series of westward emigrations that populated the West and raised the need for communications with those who remained back East.

The United States Post Office Department was slow to extend its services westward, so the first U.S. contract postal routes did not start until 1850. Prior to that, a combination of private and semi-official mail services inadequately addressed the need for communication. Accordingly, this book is organized by western destination prior to the commencement of post office service, and by transcontinental route after 1849.

The authors would like to thank the following individuals who have assisted with this book. Many generously supplied illustrations of covers in their collections and provided valuable insights. If any names are omitted, please accept our apology for the omission. In any event, all errors and omissions are the responsibility of the authors alone.

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