

## Contract Route Defaults and Endorsements

As the government postal system expanded in the 1840s and 1850s there was a proliferation of new postal routes. This was especially true in regard to the transcontinental mail routes with a total of five different routes being available in 1858. A system of default routes was utilized. That is, one route was used for the bulk of mail received and if someone wished 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.

The system was clearly explained by the San Francisco postmaster in the San Francisco *Daily Alta California* newspaper on November 15, 1858 when he announced the start of a 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"*

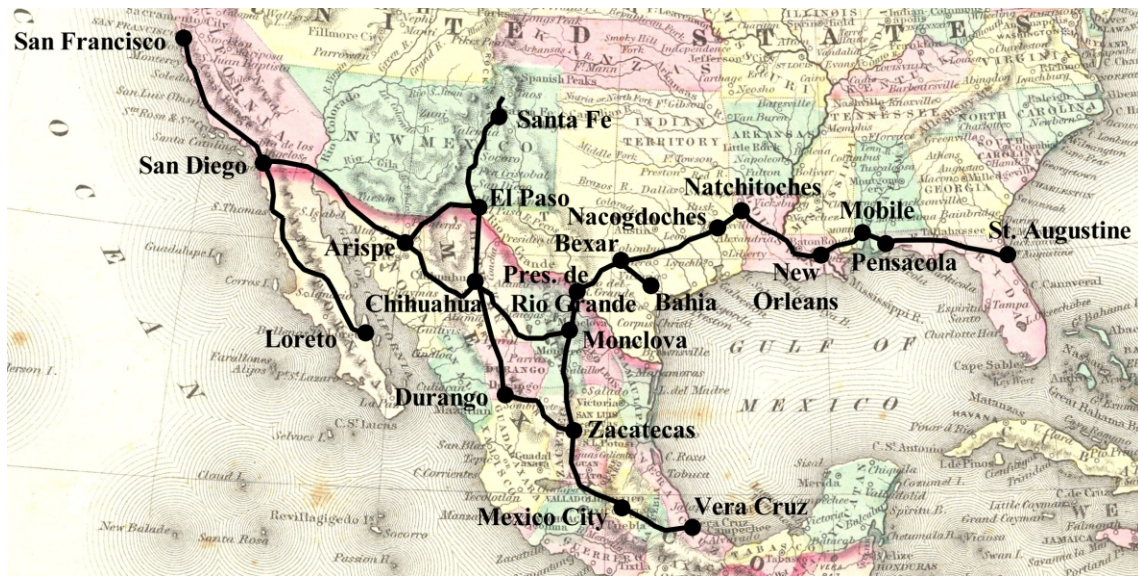
*Letters with no such endorsement upon them and all newspapers will be sent "Via Panama". Three cents will pay the postage on a single letter "Via Overland" as far as Chicago, Ills., and Cincinnati, Ohio. Beyond those points the postage will be ten cents. Newspapers throughout the state will do the public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

*C.L. WELLER, P.M.  
San Francisco  
Nov. 15, 1858*

One very interesting aspect of the system is that the default route changed with mail service disruptions or discontinuances. To learn which route an unendorsed cover was actually taken on requires knowing the default route at that particular time. For example, on December 17, 1859 the default route for letter mail from San Francisco was changed from the Panama Route to the Butterfield Overland Route. Later, in the 1860s when there were mail disruptions on the Central Overland Route the default was temporarily changed back to the Panama route, and then restored to the Overland Route several times.

The requirement to endorse letters for specific alternate routes also resulted in the manufacture and use of imprinted envelopes with directives. Many of these "propaganda" covers are illustrated with stagecoaches, or trains, as well as textual reference to the route to be used. Additionally, a few offices in California used handstamps with the word "overland" to designate the route to be used.

## Spanish Royal Roads



The Spanish empire in North America was linked with Spain via a series of Los Caminos Reales or royal roads. The three north-south roads west of Natchitoches continued to be used after Mexican independence in 1821 although no longer properly called royal roads.

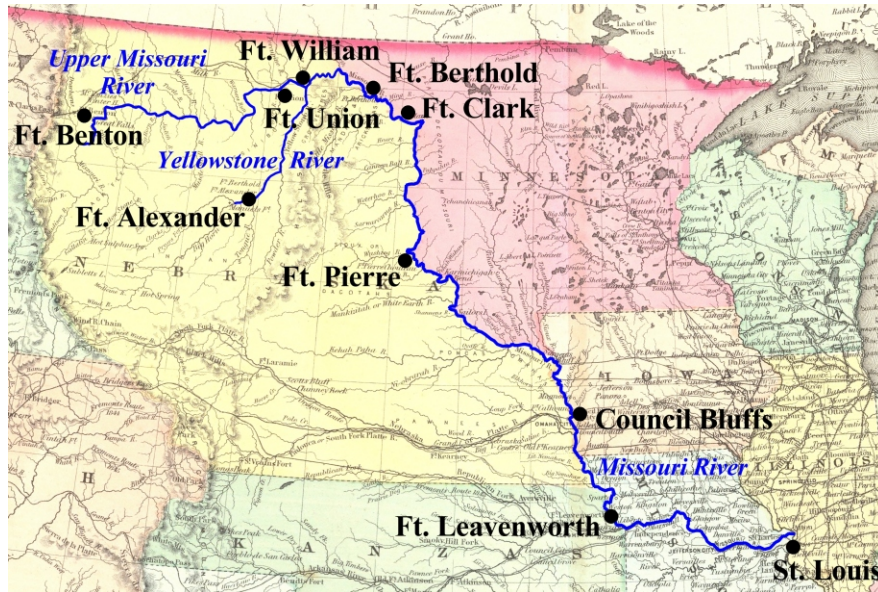
The name "El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro" (The Royal Road of the Interior Land) is most often applied to the trail that connected Mexico City with the missions, pueblos and presidios along the Rio Grande River extending north of Santa Fe, New Mexico. This trail followed the path taken by Juan de Oñate in 1598 to establish the province of New Spain. This Chihuahua Trail, connecting with the Santa Fe Trail was later used by traders as well as the military in the Mexican War.

In California the Royal Road, commonly called the "California Mission Trail" connected Mission San Francisco Solano in the north, via San Diego de Alcalá in San Diego, with Loreto in Baja California to the south. It also connected at San Diego with the road via Arispe to Mexico City. This road served primarily as a communication route between the California missions and the religious center of Mexico City. In 1776 Father Junípero Serra approved a monthly, courier mail system connecting the missions in California.

The "El Camino Real de Los Tejas" (The Royal Road of the Texas) traversed Texas following the Sabine River and connected Mexico City with what is now Natchitoches, Louisiana. This road was used as a supply and military route during the War of Texas independence as well as the Mexican War.

All three of these roads served as postal routes over a long period of time although surviving examples of such mail are rare, particularly pre 1821 uses before Mexican independence. After Mexican independence the trails deteriorated further and were not maintained adequately. The California Mission trail became a mule road, the Chihuahua Trail from New Mexico was frequently plagued by Indian troubles south of Socorro, and the path of the Old San Antonio Road was frequently altered and partially abandoned.

## Missouri River Routes



The Missouri River provided easy access to the intermountain west from an early period and its importance increased during the steamboat era. Even after the completion of the transcontinental railway in 1869 steamboats carried large amounts of mail.

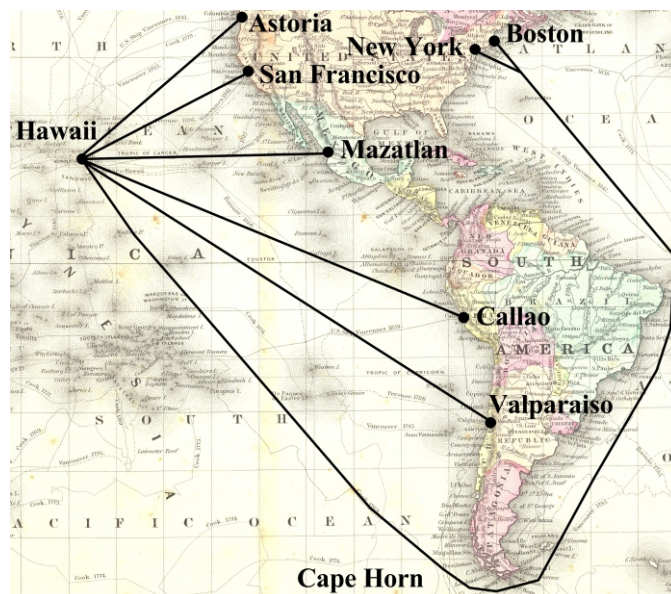
After the conclusion of the War of 1812 the American Fur Trade Company established several forts along the Missouri and Upper Missouri rivers and its tributaries. Mail was handled by returning trappers and usually entered the mails at St. Louis.

The government sponsored Yellowstone Expedition of 1819, also known as the Missouri enterprise, was the first attempt to ascend the Missouri River to the mouth of the Yellowstone by steam. The specially designed steamboat *Western Engineer*, whose hull drew only 19 inches of water, succeeded in making it only to a point about five miles below Council Bluffs. In 1820 the remaining troops under Major Stephen Long chose to travel west on the Platte River instead.

In 1831 the American Fur Trade Company steamboat *Yellowstone* reached Ft. Pierre. The following year, on March 26, 1832 the same steamer departed St. Louis for the upper reaches of the Missouri River. She arrived at Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone River about June 17th proving that the river could be successfully navigated by steam.

Although the Missouri River was deemed unsatisfactory for regular mail contracts by the post office except for a small segment of the lower river in the 1850s, mail continued to be carried privately by the several steamboat companies operating. In 1876 the Army contracted the steamer *Far West* to haul troops and supplies to the Dakota and Montana Territories and gained fame by bringing out the wounded after the Battle of the Little Big Horn - a 710 mile passage from the Little Big Horn River to Ft. Abraham Lincoln accomplished in 54 hours. The Benton Line steamers operated to Fort Benton well into the 1880s.

## Hawaii Mail Routes



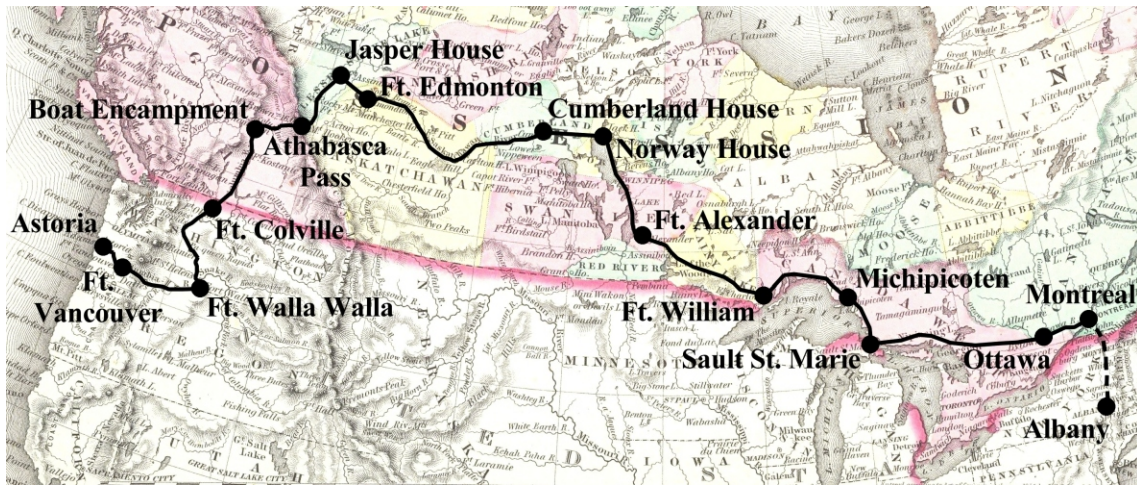
The mail routes connecting the United States and Hawaii were largely dictated by the growing need of Americans visiting or taking up residence in the islands. Early missionaries began arriving in 1820, whaling vessels operating to the far reaches of the Pacific Ocean frequented the islands, and Honolulu became an important port of call point for commercial and naval vessels of the French, British and the United States. The Hudson's Bay Company even used Honolulu as a stop on their yearly supply trip to Ft. Vancouver on the Columbia River (now present day Oregon).

Before San Francisco became the primary transit point for mail to the United States in 1849 the mails were entirely private in nature. During this period mail communication was a function of what ships heading for the United States were in port. Many of the whalers stopped at Hawaii before returning home via Cape Horn and took letters which typically entered the mails at the great whaling ports of New England or New York. An additional route via Mexico was in use between 1828 and 1848.

After the opening of the Hawaiian post office on December 21, 1850 the mail route to San Francisco was normalized and no longer private in nature although private forwarders were often employed to expedite mail handling, or to save money by bundling letters. Honolulu became a transit point for letters carried by fast clipper ships enroute from Australia and China as well. From San Francisco mail could be sent onward by water or overland over the multiple routes available. Some mails were sent via South American points to connect with the American mails at Panama.

On September 5, 1867 a contract mail service using steamships operating between San Francisco and Honolulu was inaugurated. Operated by the California, Oregon and Mexico Steamship Company, eastbound covers mailed before August 1869 bear the "Hawaiian Steam Service" handstamps that were applied upon arrival in San Francisco.

## Hudson's Bay Company Canoe Brigade Mail Route

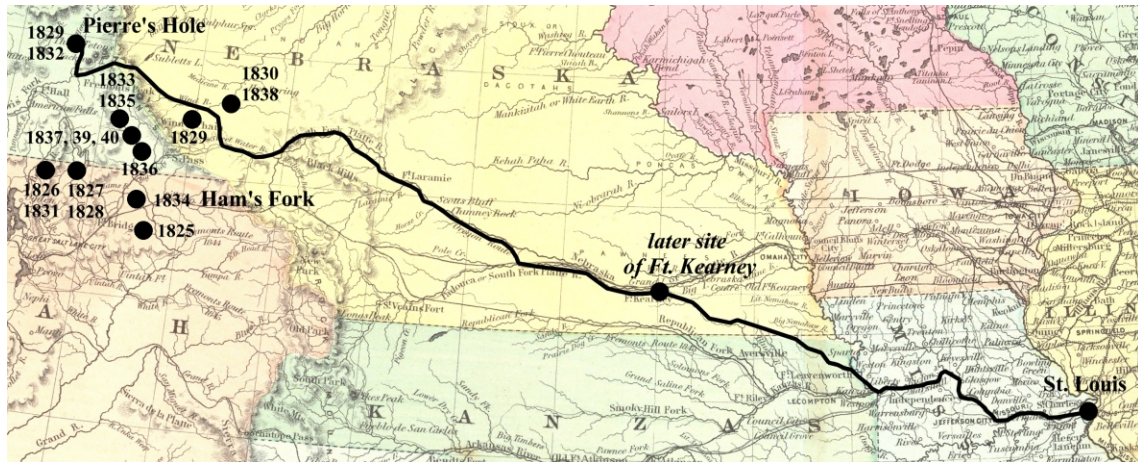


After the 1821 merger of Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) and the North West Company of Montreal, HBC's virtual monopoly of the fur trade business in Canada extended to the Pacific Ocean in the west and the Arctic to the north. The HBC headquarters in the Pacific Northwest was located at Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River (now Oregon) throughout the 1820s and 1830s. During this period the Anglo-American Treaty of 1818 officially granted dual authority in the area but the HBC's Chief Factor, John McLoughlin, was active in discouraging settlement. Operations extended southward into northern California.

Communication between the HBC factory at Fort Vancouver and England was via ship, usually stopping at Hawaii on the voyage. In addition to their supply ship routes to England, the HBC operated a once yearly overland express connecting their western factories at Red River, York, and Fort Vancouver with their headquarters at Montreal, Canada. This canoe brigade, with mail, left Fort Vancouver every spring during the early 1830's. They did not charge for this service but mail on business matters was not permitted except for those in the service of the Company. The trip was accomplished on an overland route utilizing inland waterways where possible. The mails were carried mainly by native Americans in their service.

The majority of the few reported letters that were carried overland by the HBC expresses are from the Nathaniel Wyeth correspondence after his arrival at Fort Vancouver in 1833. These letters were deposited in the Montreal post office and were carried by steamboat to Albany where they entered the U.S. mails with a manuscript "B" and postal rate.

## Fur Trade Rendezvous Mail



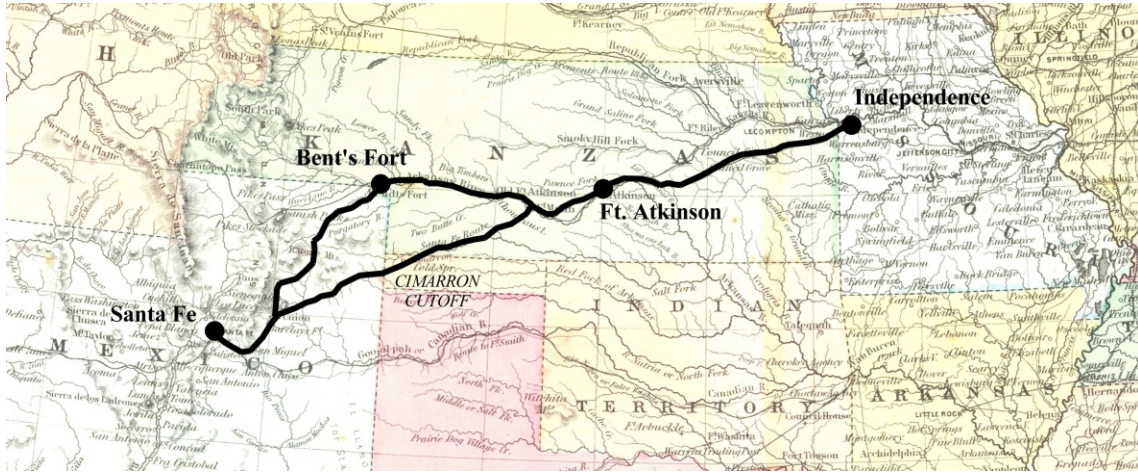
The map above shows the fur trapper rendezvous sites used each summer between 1825 and 1840. The route in black shows the return path taken by William Sublette from the rendezvous in 1832 held at Pierre's Hole (northwest of present day Jackson, Wyoming).

Sublette carried at least two letters mail on this trip for his friend Nathaniel Wyeth and possibly others along with his cargo of 169 packs of beaver pelts. He departed on July 30 and arrived in St. Louis on October 3, 1832. He placed the mail he was carrying into the St. Louis post office two days later.

An additional Wyeth correspondence letter dated June 24, 1834 from the rendezvous at "Hams Fork of the Colorado of the West" (southwest of what is now Granger, Wyoming) was carried to the mails at Saint Louis by Joseph Reddeford Walker and Michel S. Cerre on their return trip with furs belonging to Captain L.E. Bonneville. The route taken is unknown. It was posted in Saint Louis on September 1, 1834 and forwarded.

The pair of 1832 Wyeth letters are the earliest reported uses from west of the Rocky Mountains carried transcontinentally through the United States. Including the 1834 Wyeth letter, they represent the only mailed letters dated from the rendezvous sites.

## Santa Fe Trail Mail



Following the announcement of Mexican independence, William Becknell departed Missouri on a trading expedition to New Mexico. He arrived in Santa Fe in November 1821 after following the route which became famous as the Santa Fe Trail. This route, originally touching at Bents Fort in what is now Colorado remained the primary commercial, mail and military route to the Southwest for decades. The Cimarron cutoff, a shorter route over less mountainous terrain was also used.

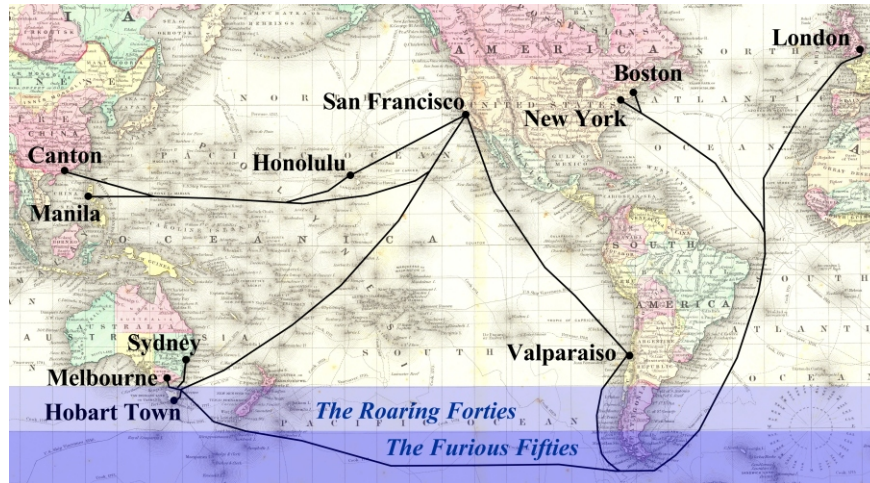
The trail connected at Santa Fe with the Chihuahua Trail, the Spanish period El Camino Real de la Tierra Adentro (Royal Road to the Interior Lands), which provided an entry port for international trade to central Mexico. Mail from traders was carried privately to Missouri by returning merchants.

In 1846 Doniphan's Expedition followed the Bents Fort route to Santa Fe as part of the American invasion force in the Mexican War. After General Kearny's forces occupied Santa Fe on August 18, 1846, he established a civil and military government in New Mexico as well as a military express office in Santa Fe. Civilian and military mails were carried by military expresses, contracted for by the military, that operated irregularly over the Santa Fe trail. Typically, such letters entered the mails at Fort Leavenworth or Independence, Missouri.

On May 11, 1850 Waldo, Hall and Company was awarded a contract for a monthly mail on the route between Independence and Santa Fe. The first westbound trip departed Independence on May 11, 1850. The contract was given to Jacob Hall from August 18, 1854 and service improved to semi-monthly on July 1, 1857.

After several route contract changes, re-assignments and attempts at alternate routes to serve New Mexico, a weekly service on the route was begun on July 1, 1862. From July 1, 1866 Sanderson, Barlow and Bradley were the contractors with the terminus changed from Independence to Junction City, Kansas. The route was shortened gradually with the westward advance of the Union Pacific railroad. The eastern terminus for the route was changed to Fort Harker in 1867, then to Hayes City, and then to Phil Sheridan in 1869.

## Clipper Ship Routes



In the 1840s a faster sailing vessel, the Clipper ship, began to be built in the United States and to a lesser extent in Great Britain. The term had previously been used to define any fast sailing vessel, those usually making 150 miles per day, but the term became almost synonymous with the unique brand of American Clipper that was designed specifically for high speed sailing. Built to carry small, valuable cargo, speed became more important than cargo capacity and the size of the hold was reduced, the bow sharpened, and the total area of sail increased. The fastest of these ships, including several built by Boston naval architect Donald McKay, could travel more than 350 miles a day in good winds.

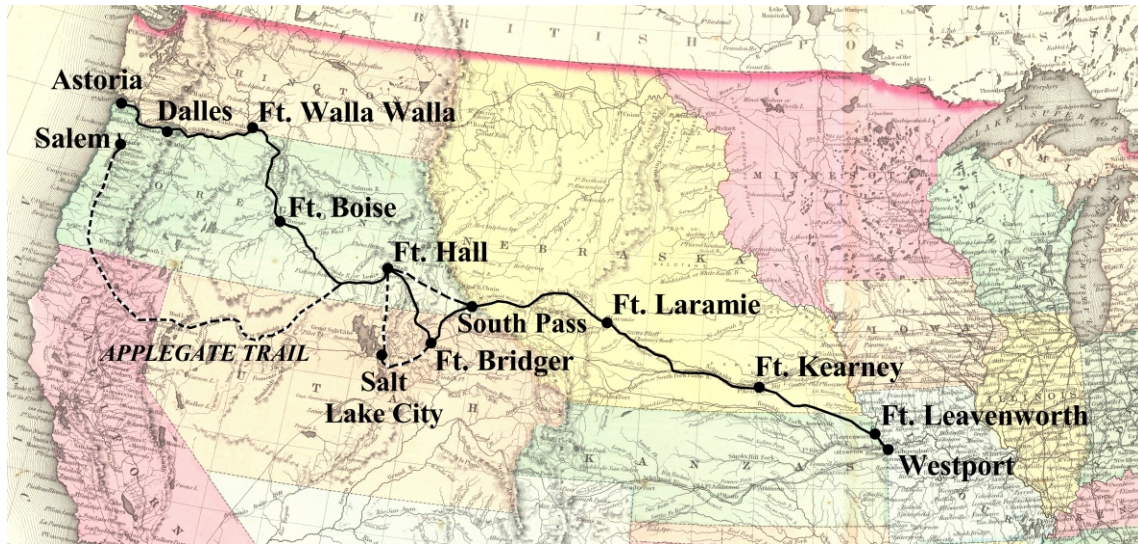
The era of dominance of the American Clipper ships in the China and Australia trade lasted from about 1845 to 1859 when several of the fastest, the so-called extreme Clippers, were made in American shipyards. They were particularly important after the discovery of gold in California and Australia. After the Crimean war began in 1853, many British steamers were pulled off the usual routes to Australia to serve as troop transports thereby increasing the importance of the Clipper ships in the handling of mail.

The Clippers plied the seas, via Cape Horn, between Liverpool and Melbourne, New York and San Francisco and established records for speed which have never been equaled under sail. The *Lightening* made a record 436 nautical miles in 24 hours.

Strong winds played an important part in the speed on the clipper ship routes around Cape Horn. Between latitudes 40°S and 50°S the very strong prevailing winds are aptly named "The Roaring Forties" by sailors while the name "The Furious Fifties" is used for the latitudes between 50°S and 60°S where even stronger winds are the norm.

The American owned clipper ships operated without mail contracts and the mails they carried were treated as ship letters upon arrival at ports. Mail originating in the Australian States was usually taken by mail to Melbourne before carriage by private Clipper ship and those also show ship postage due upon arrival. However, a few of the British clippers did have mail contracts and the mail they carried could be prepaid to destination.

## Oregon Trail Mail



There were multiple overland trails to the Oregon Country in use in the 1830s and 1840s. In 1836 Dr. Marcus Whitman, his wife Narcissa, and a small party were the first to travel by wagon over the Oregon Trail. After a stop at the Fur Trade Rendezvous they established a Presbyterian Mission to the Native American Cayuse just west of Ft. Walla Walla. Narcissa was accompanied on this trip by Eliza Hart Spaulding and they became the first white women to cross the continent.

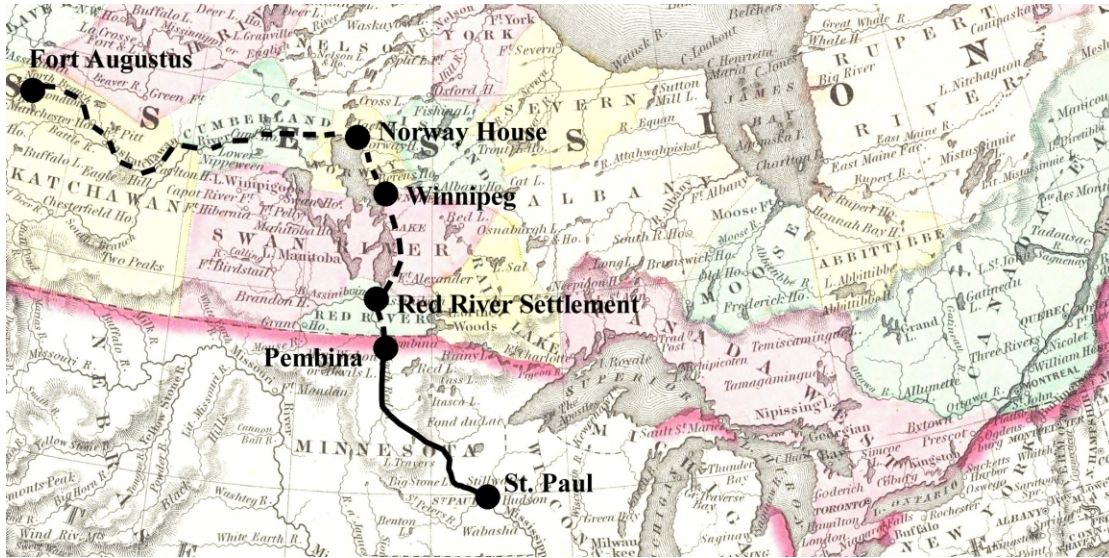
In 1839 an American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions party that included Asahel Munger departed from Salt Westport, Missouri to the Oregon Country with a group of American Fur Trade Company men. The fur traders split company at Ft. Hall and the Munger party continued to the Whitman Mission. A single letter carried by the Munger party on this trip is known that arrived at the Tsihmakain mission northwest of present day Spokane before September 16, 1839.

In 1846 the Applegate party surveyed an alternate emigrant route along a more southerly line to the Oregon Country. Another variant route bypassed Ft. Bridger completely and the 1851 contract route connected the trail and Salt Lake City.

The first official government mail to Oregon arrived at Astoria on September 7, 1847 with John M. Shively carrying his post office appointment along with a mail from the East. One letter is known from this trip. As previously, most mails from the Oregon Country continued to be carried by water to either San Francisco or Hawaii.

On May 22, 1851 the first overland mail contract on the Oregon Route was let to L.G. Torrence and J.L. Brown to carry mail between the Dalles and Salt Lake City. The first contract mails were scheduled to leave Salt Lake City on August 1, 1851 and arrive at the Dalles on August 30th. The first eastbound through trip was delayed at the Dalles and did not arrive at Salt Lake City on September 30, 1851. A single letter, picked up enroute at Ft. Boise, is known from this trip.

## Via Pembina Mail Route



Pembina, at the mouth of the Pembina River on the west side of the Red River in what is now North Dakota, was an important entry point into the United States for goods and mail originating in western Canada. The American Fur Trade Company had a well established post at the location by 1840 and trade with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) factory at Red River Settlement (now Winnipeg) flourished. Goods and mail sent from Red River Settlements were carried, via Pembina, to Saint Paul, Minnesota Territory and the route became known as the "Red River Trail." In the winter months dog sleds replaced the usual ox carts for transporting the mails.

Although HBC operated an express from Fort Vancouver to Montreal that passed through the Red River Settlement the service eastward to Montreal was irregular and very slow. After the establishment of a United States post office at Pembina on May 18, 1850 some of the HBC mail was diverted from their express route and carried privately instead to the U.S. mails at Pembina or directly to points further east such as St. Paul.

A November 4, 1853 letter of William Ross, a retired HBC employee, mentions that a subscription post "to aid the Yankees to carry the mail" will leave the following day. Those who did not subscribe were obliged to pay five shillings per letter. This subscription post connected to the United States mail at Pembina where a post office had previously been established on May 18, 1850 or at additional points on the trail to Saint Paul.

In February 1855 William Ross was appointed by the Council of Assiniboia as a postmaster. This was not an official Canadian post office appointment. A charge of one penny was levied for this private carriage between Red River and Pembina. Ross introduced provisional postal markings for the service that were used briefly between November 10, 1855 and March 10, 1856. Ross died suddenly on May 4, 1856 and the markings ceased. In the 1860s HBC privately handled mails between Ft. Garry and Pembina. United States stamps could be purchased from HBC as an accommodation. No official Canadian post office was established near Red River Settlement until the Fort Garry office opened in 1870.

## Kearny's California Mail Route



The earliest United States regular mail route to be established within California predates the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which formally ceded Alta California to the United States in 1848 after the Mexican-American War. This "regular mail" route was actually a military express mail service inaugurated by military governor Stephen W. Kearny in April 1847. Although operated by the military, letters from civilians were authorized to be carried and all mail was carried free of charge. The mail system is properly categorized as an American mail route operating in Mexican California.

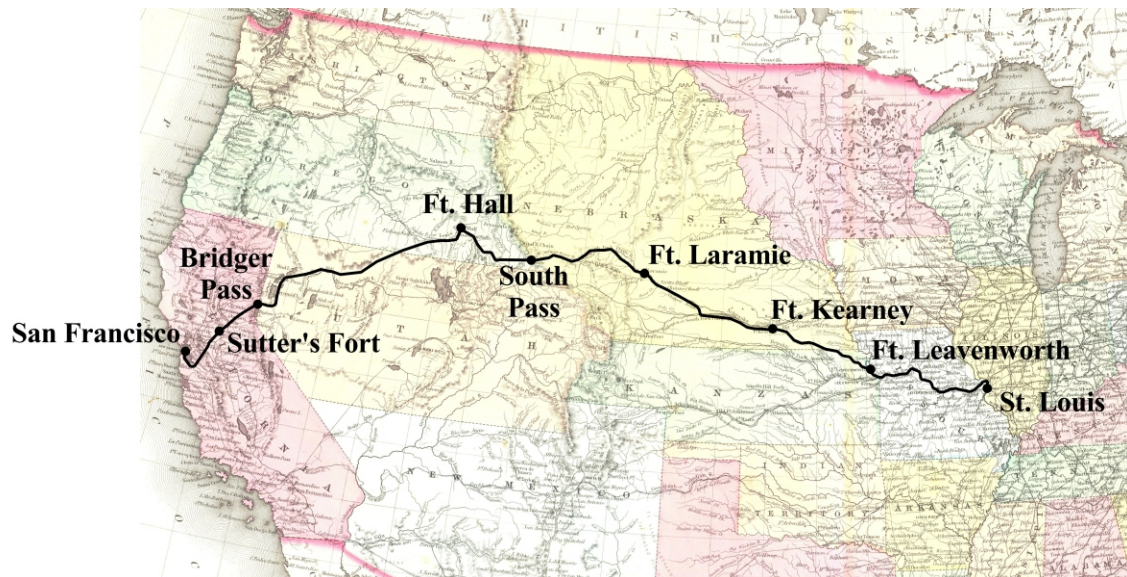
It was announced in the *California Star* (later the Daily Alta Californian) edition of Saturday, April 17, 1847 as follows:

*REGULAR MAIL. Our readers will be pleased to learn the Gov. Kearny has established a semi-monthly mail, to run regularly between San Francisco and San Diego. This mail is to be carried on horseback, by a party consisting of two soldiers; and is to commence on the 19th inst. Starting every other Monday from San Diego, and San Francisco, the parties to meet at Captain Dana's Ranch, the next Saturday to exchange Mails; and start back on their respective routes the next morning, and arrive at San Diego and San Francisco, on the Sunday following, and so continuing.*

The route followed closely the Spanish Royal Road which connected the California Missions with Mexico City. Parts of the trail had been used to carry mail since at least 1776 when Father Junipero Serra suggested a monthly mail be established to connect the Presidio of San Diego and Monterey.

It is not known how long the route remained in operation beyond the January 9, 1849 date quoted in a government report. There is only one reported letter endorsed for carriage on Kearny's California mail route.

## Kearny's Overland Mail of 1847



The political situation in California was rather confused in 1847. Although John C. Fremont had signed the treaty of Cahuenga that ended the fighting in California, Commodore Stockton and General Stephen W. Kearny who were also present at the time outranked Fremont and a conflict arose. Kearny, with orders to serve as military governor from the President, demanded that Fremont step down. After refusing to do so, Kearny ordered Fremont to accompany him back east.

Kearny's expedition east carried the first overland mail from California with official sanction. After collecting letters received from the California mail route previously established, Kearny appointed Colonel Richard B. Mason as military governor of California and departed Monterey on May 31, 1847 on the overland journey. Kearny proceeded to New Helvetia (Sacramento) near Sutter's Fort to await Fremont. On June 14, 1847 Kearny departed camp with Fremont and his group closely following. The route that the Kearny expedition took is shown above. After burying members of the Donner's ill-fated party at the pass the two parties continued onward to Fort Leavenworth arriving there on August 22, 1847.

Kearny, accompanied by the mail from California, went aboard the steamer Amelia on August 23 for her southbound trip on the Missouri River to Saint Louis. The Amelia arrived in Saint Louis on August 25, 1847 and the mails were deposited into the St. Louis post office.

There of the four known letters carried on Kearny's overland mail of 1847. Two are dated from San Francisco, one from Monterey and one from Los Angeles. All of these letters entered the mails at Saint Louis on August 26 and bear the red "Steam 10" handstamp applied upon arrival.

## Via Panama Mail Route

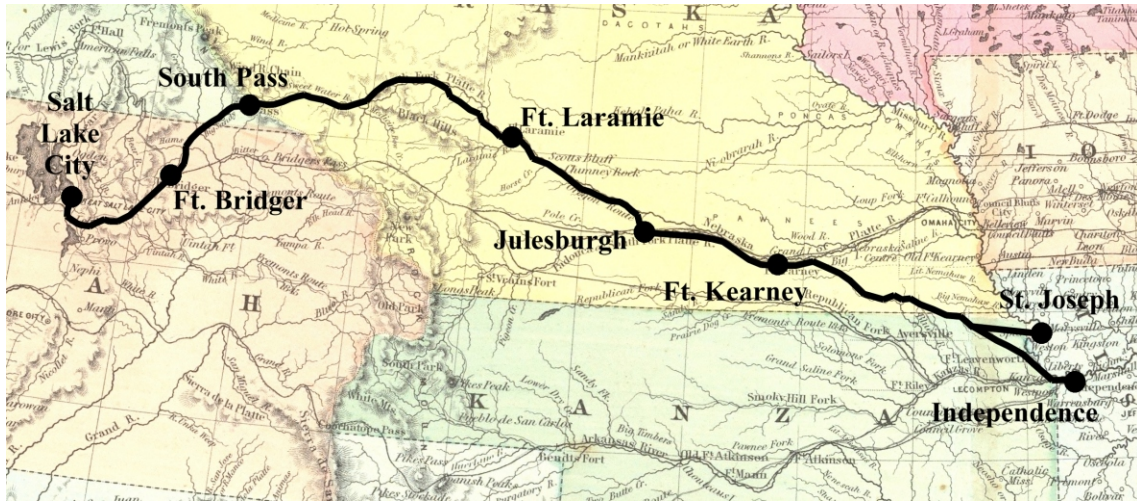


The most important contract mail route connecting California and the East was the route, via the Isthmus of Panama, between San Francisco and New York. This route carried the majority of mail during the period between 1849 and the July 1, 1861 commencement of daily overland mail on the central route although much of the eastbound mail had begun to be diverted to the Central Route from December 17, 1860. During this period, with minor exceptions, all letters not specifically endorsed to be carried over other routes was carried via Panama. The Panama route continued as a secondary route until the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869.

There were three segments to the route. The United States Mail Steamship Company (USMC) held the contract for mail on the Atlantic side with service commencing October 1, 1848. Over the years the route and intermediate ports changed slightly. The Pacific Mail Steamship Company (PMSS) held the contract for mail on the Pacific Ocean. The PMSC service was between San Francisco and Panama City with intermediate stops that varied and service commenced with the March 19, 1849 San Francisco departure of the ship *Callao* in temporary service. A seventy mile trail across the Isthmus of Panama connected the two ocean mail routes. Original service was provided by the PMSS but on January 1, 1852 the transit contract was given to the Panama Railroad Company. The railway was completed in January 1855.

Post Office route agents were assigned to the steamers in the early period and used distinctive markings. In addition to the contract mails carried on the Via Panama route, many transcontinental private express companies used the same steamers to carry their agents, often accompanied by express mail bags, over the same route.

## 1850 Salt Lake City to Missouri (Woodson) Route



Mail service between Salt Lake City and the East was largely unsatisfactory during the period before the commencement of the daily overland mail on July 1, 1861. Several different contractors failed in their attempts to meet contract requirements and various private and Mormon expresses also proved unreliable.

In 1850 a four year contract was awarded to Samuel Woodson for a monthly service from Independence, Missouri to Salt Lake City. The service commenced on July 1, 1850 and was to continue until June 30, 1854. In July of 1851, Woodson subcontracted with Fearmorz Little to carry the mail on the Salt Lake City and Fort Laramie section. The mail service proved poor to nonexistent.

In 1854 a new contract was awarded to W.M.F. Magraw for a route between Salt Lake City and Independence. The contract specified monthly mail service at \$14,400 annual compensation. Following Indian depredations on the route the compensation was increased.

Hiram Kimball was awarded a contract for a monthly service on route #8,911 between Salt Lake City and St. Joseph, Missouri on October 16, 1856. In October 1857, after Kimball's failure, the service was let to S.B. Mills at \$32,000 per annum.

The contract was re-let and awarded to J.M. Hockaday at \$190,000 per annum for a weekly service commencing May 1858. On April 14, 1859 service was reduced to twice-monthly and payment reduced. In May 1859 the Jones, Russell and Company purchased the contract.

On March 12, 1861 the central overland route between California and Missouri was unified and a contract with the Overland Mail Company signed with daily mail service to commence July 1, 1861. In the interim, Butterfield had moved his southern mail route to the central route.

## 1851 California to Salt Lake City (Chorpenning) Route



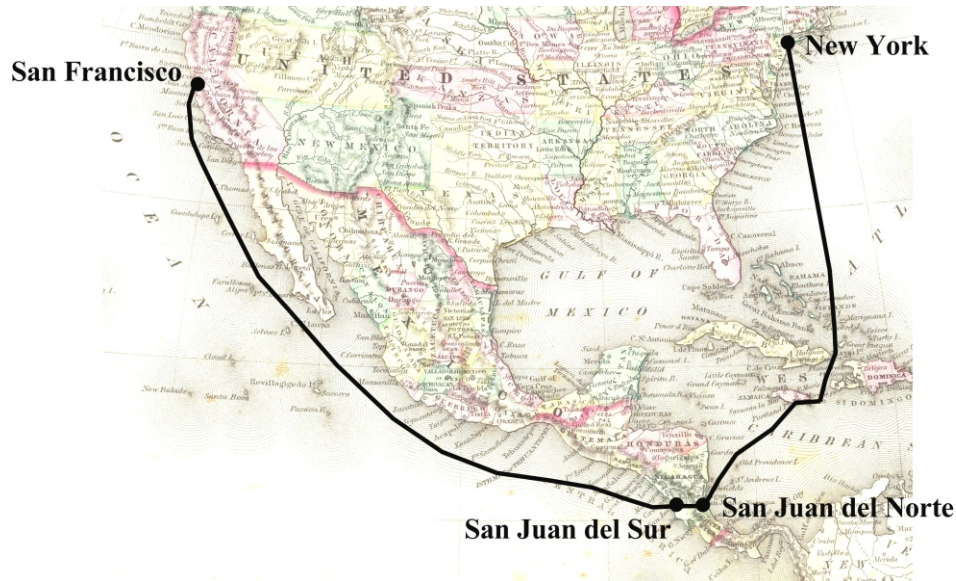
In 1851 Absalom Woodward and George Chorpenning were awarded the contract for a monthly mail service connecting California and Salt Lake City as route #12,801. The service was intended to connect at Salt Lake City with the monthly Missouri mails. The eastbound service commenced from Sacramento on May 1, 1851 and arrived at Salt Lake City on June 5, 1851. The first westbound trip left Salt Lake City on July 1, 1851. Later that same year Woodward was killed by Indians and Chorpenning carried out the remaining mail contract without a partner.

The 1851-1852 winter mails were delayed by snow and only the February trip made it to Salt Lake City. After this, Chorpenning received permission from the San Francisco postmaster to send the March mails by steamer to San Pedro (the port for Los Angeles) and thence by the Old Spanish Trail to Salt Lake City. Summer mails of 1852 and 1853 were again carried on the original route via Placerville and Genoa while winter mails were carried on the winter route via San Pedro.

In July 1854 Chorpenning secured a new four year contract that allowed a route change for both summer and winter mails. The new termini were Salt Lake City and San Diego. On July 1, 1858 a new Chorpenning contract with the Post Office Department went into effect. The contract re-established the Salt Lake City to Placerville route and required weekly trips until it was reduced to semi-monthly trips from July 1, 1859. In the interim, on September 15, 1858, the new Butterfield route between Memphis / St. Louis and San Francisco was inaugurated. This service, over a southern route, was semi weekly and the bulk of the transcontinental mails began this route immediately. On May 11, 1860 the contract was transferred to the Central Overland and Pike's Peak Express with semi-monthly service.

Because this route with plagued with mail delays from the start, very little mail was carried. Most of the few surviving covers are uses between California and Salt Lake City.

## Via Nicaragua Private Mail Route



Cornelius Vanderbilt founded his Independent Line with the intent to operate a passenger and mail route across Nicaragua in opposition to the contract mail steamers operating via Panama to California. He chose the route because it was substantially faster than the longer contract route. In 1853 he received a concession for his Accessory Transit Company from Nicaragua to cross the country. The route was by steamer from New York to San Juan del Norte on the Mosquito Coast of Nicaragua, by river to Lake Nicaragua, across the lake to Rivas, by stage to San Juan del Sur and by steamer to San Francisco.

The first through trip from San Francisco that carried mail was likely the September 14, 1852 departure of the S.S. Lewis. After transit across Nicaragua, mails connected with the Daniel Webster departing San Juan del Norte on October 6 and arriving in New Orleans on October 11, 1852. Use of the route decreased after filibuster William Walker's incursion into Nicaragua in 1855. By August 29, 1855 Walker controlled San Juan del Sur and continued in control until 1857. Later, Vanderbilt extorted a monthly stipend from the companies that held the via Panama mail contracts and his Accessory Transit Company ceased to operate. The route was resurrected from late 1862 until the first months of 1868 but seldom used.

Mail carried without contract over this route frequently bore propaganda handstamps such as "Via Nicaragua Ahead of the Mails" and soon other competing lines began carrying mails without contract. Some of these handstamps were applied by letter bag operators, or news agencies, in San Francisco while others were likely applied by the steamship offices or express companies using the route.

Eastbound covers carried privately via Nicaragua usually entered the mails at New York City and bear their ship or steamship markings. There are few westbound covers reported and only one eastbound cover from the 1860s period.

## 1857 San Diego to San Antonio (Jackass Mail) Route



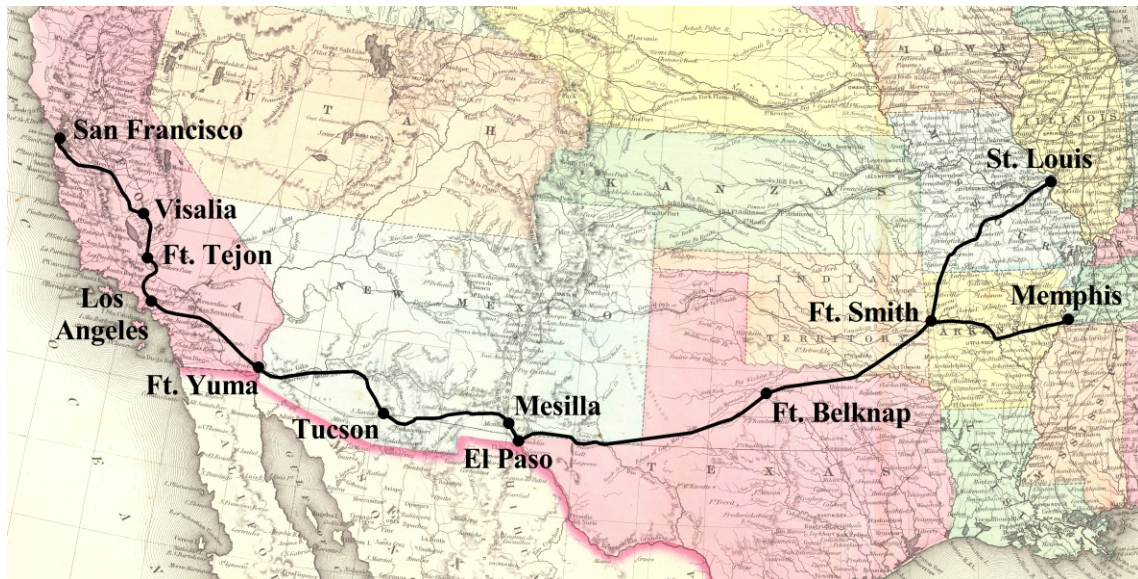
The first overland mail route to California to be operated under a single contract was officially known as route #8,076, or the San Antonio to San Diego route. Mail transportation across the Colorado Desert lying between Fort Yuma and San Diego utilized mules for carrying mail and lent the "jackass mail" moniker to that portion of the route. From the eastern terminus at San Antonio, there was a daily stagecoach mail to Indianola which connected with five-times a week steamers to New Orleans. From the western terminus at San Diego, the California Steam Navigation Company steamers operated to San Francisco, albeit only semi-monthly.

A mail contract was awarded to James Birch on June 22, 1857, effective for four years, from July 1, 1857. The contract for route 8,076 called for two trips per month between San Antonio, Texas and San Diego, California at \$149,800 per annum. The 1476 mile route was to be accomplished in thirty days. With connections onward from both termini to the major points in both California and the East, it was hoped that this route would be both faster and less costly than other routes available.

The first westbound mail under the Birch contract departed San Antonio on July 9, 1857. The first and second mails arrived at San Diego together on August 31, 1857. The first eastbound trip departed San Diego on August 9, 1857. The route was soon fragmented in into separate sections as shown on the map and the portion east of Ft. Yuma later became part of the Butterfield Southern mail route. The original Birch route was modified on October 27, 1858 when a portion of the service was discontinued. Service over the "jackass mail" portion of the route between San Diego and Ft. Yuma was discontinued from April 1, 1860.

Covers carried on the Jackass Mail route were to be endorsed "via San Diego and San Antonio" or similar. There are ten recorded covers, emanating from just three correspondences, which are endorsed to be carried on the portion of the route between San Diego and Yuma.

## 1858 San Francisco to Memphis / St. Louis (Butterfield) Mail Route



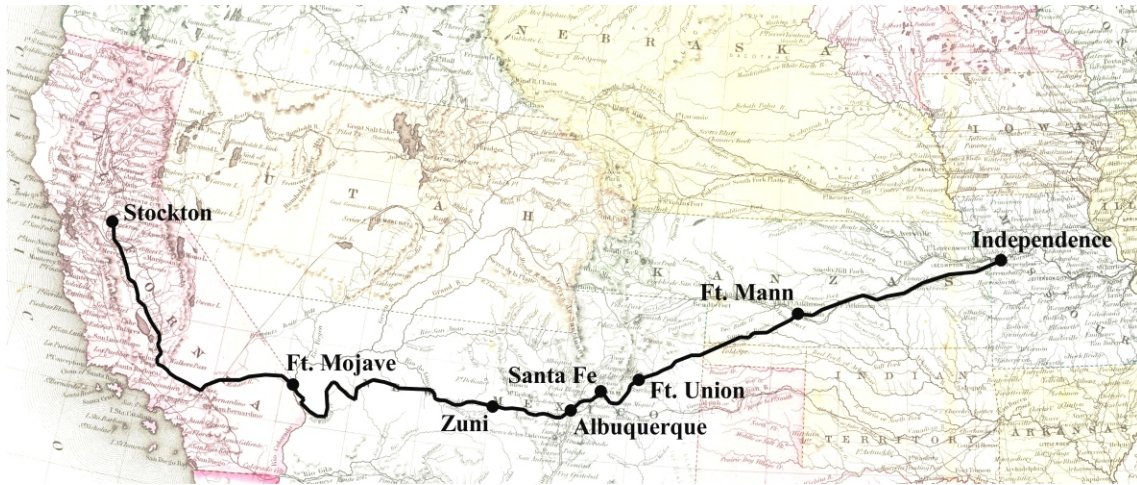
The Butterfield Southern Overland mail route was a Post Office contract service officially designated as route #12,578. The route was from St. Louis, Missouri, and Memphis, Tennessee converging at Fort Smith, Arkansas, to San Francisco, California twice a week. The contract was let to John Butterfield and Company with service commencing on September 15, 1858 at \$600,000 per annum. Service was to be performed in four horse coaches or spring wagons in 25 days.

Butterfield soon joined forces with other parties to form the Overland Mail Company to fulfill the contract and by March 1860 the Overland Mail Company was effectively under the control of Wells Fargo directors. Following Indian depredations on the route in early 1861, and the looming Civil War, the Post Office awarded the Overland Mail Company a contract on March 12, 1861 for daily mail service over the central route from July 1, 1861.

The last eastbound mail successfully carried on the southern route departed San Francisco on March 27 and arrived at St. Louis on May 1, 1861. The last westbound bounds left St. Louis on March 21 and arrived San Francisco on April 13, 1861. By May 17 the Mesilla, New Mexico Territory newspaper reported that the Overland Mail Company stock of 10 men, 21 coaches, some 200 animals and other vehicles had passed through the town as the company moved resources to the central route.

Covers intended to be carried on the Butterfield Southern Overland mail route were to bear an endorsement or designation to indicate the sender's preference for the route. On mail originating in California these typically included words such as "Via Los Angeles" or similar. Several different stagecoach illustrated envelopes were produced with route directives which served the same function. A special "Overland" handstamp was also used by some towns and is primarily found on mail received in transit.

## 1858 Stockton to Independence Mail Route



Although a postal route from Independence, Missouri to Stockton, California was authorized in 1855 it was not until May 1857 that a contract was signed with Jacob Hall. Hall transferred the contract to Barron, Porter & Crenshaw upon signing and service was not commenced until October 1, 1858 when the first westbound mail departed. The first eastbound mail left Stockton on November 1, 1858. The monthly service, designated as route #15,050, was to be performed in mule wagons at \$79,999 per year.

The service, referred to as the "Kansas and Stockton Mail" in the 1859 *Report of the Postmaster General*, was discontinued on May 11, 1859, effective from July 1, 1859. The report states that: "During the period of nine months that it was in operation, there were but four arrivals of through mails at Kansas, and but two at Stockton. The whole mail matter received at Kansas from Stockton consisted of two letters and twenty-six newspapers while it appears, from the returns, that but a single letter reached Stockton from Kansas." The same report mentions that the bulk of the \$1,255 credited as receipts originated from mail carried over partial legs of the route.

Mail to be carried over the route was required to be endorsed for carriage using the name of one of the terminal points. There exists only one reported cover so endorsed and it can not be confirmed as having been actually carried over the route.

## 1858 Via Tehuantepec Mail Route



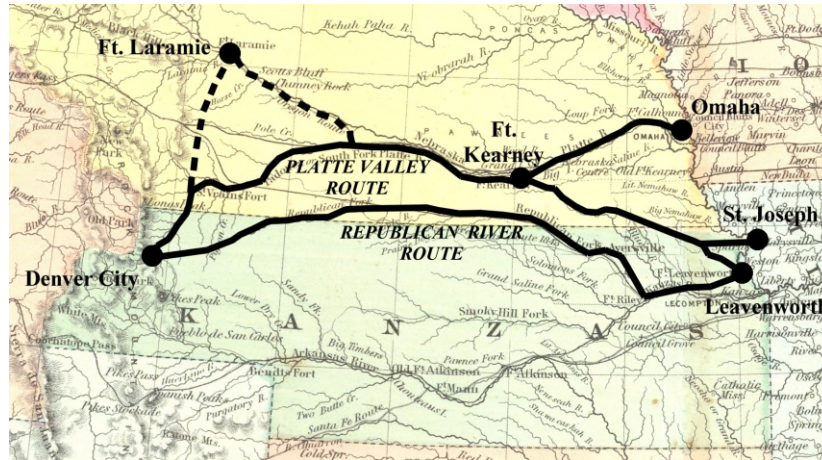
A contract for service on route #8162 between New Orleans and San Francisco via the Isthmus of Tehuantepec was awarded in June 1858 to the Louisiana Tehuantepec Company for the term of one year. The twice monthly service was to be performed by steamers between New Orleans and Minatitlan, Mexico by river steamers to Suchil, by spring wagons to Tehuantepec. Upon reaching the Pacific, mails were turned over to the Pacific Mail Steamship Company for carriage from Acapulco to San Francisco.

The first steamer departed New Orleans on October 27, 1858 and the mails arrived at San Francisco 18 days later. The first eastbound trip departed San Francisco on November 5, 1858 and the mails reached New Orleans on November 21, 1858. The last eastbound trip arrived in New Orleans on October 10, 1859.

Although the route was somewhat faster than the via Panama route between San Francisco and New Orleans, postmaster general Holt decided not to renew the contract after reviewing the expense of \$250,000 against receipts of only \$5,276.

Letters had to be inscribed "Via Tehuantepec" for carriage over this route. Surviving eastbound letters outnumber westbound letters by a ratio of three to one. In addition there are reported covers sent from Tehuantepec. These covers, from the Webster correspondence, were sent while he was agent for the company. There are fewer than thirty covers reported that were carried over this route.

## Colorado Private Express Mail Routes



The earliest mails from the Colorado Gold Regions were carried up the "Trapper's Trail" and entered the mails at Fort Laramie, Fort Kearney or elsewhere along the route to Missouri. Some mails went by subscription expresses while others were carried by favor.

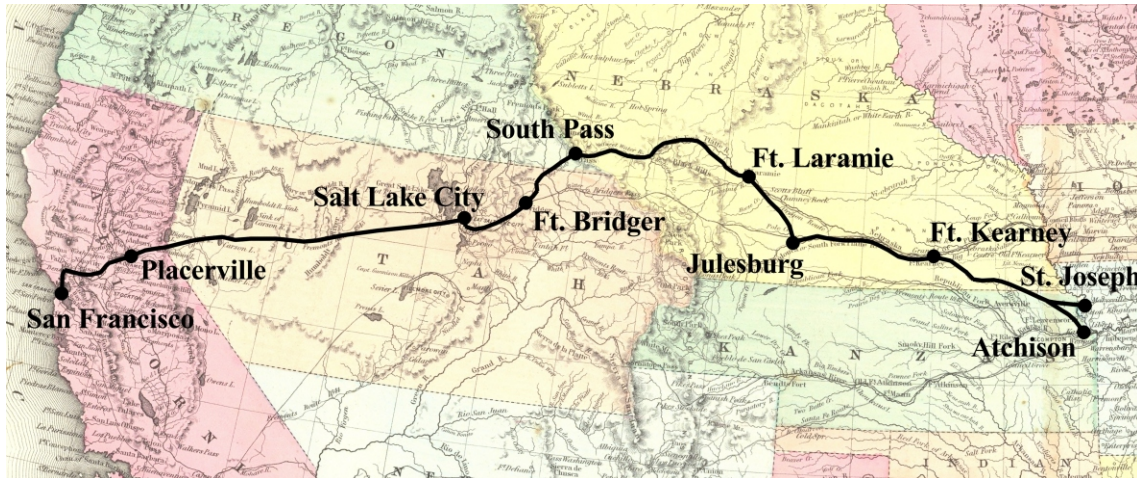
The Leavenworth City & Pike's Peak Express Company was formed in February 1859 by William Russell and John Jones to operate an express to and from Denver City. At the time Russell was a partner in the freighting firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell but his partners did not share his enthusiasm for the project.

The express operated between Denver City and Leavenworth City, Kansas Territory with the inaugural trip over the Republican River Route from Independence, Missouri arriving in Denver on May 7, 1859. On May 11, 1859 Jones & Russell purchased the unexpired year and one-half mail contract for the Salt Lake City to Missouri route under the mistaken impression that the post office would allow him to alter the route to touch at Denver.

Between June 8 and June 25, 1859 three trips were made from the Coraville post office in Denver, over the Platte Valley route, as government contract mail matter in error. From June 26 to July 19, 1859 mails were again carried as express matter. On July 19, 1859 a new device with the "Jones & Russell's Pike's Peak Express Company" name arrived at Denver. This reflected a change in name only and the former gradually abandoned. The company assets were taken over by Russell, Majors and Waddell when the Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express (COC&PP) was formed in October 28, 1859 and incorporated in February 1860. The eastern terminus of the route was changed from Leavenworth City, Kansas Territory to Saint Joseph, Missouri in April 1860. It was sold to Ben Holladay on March 21, 1862.

Hinckley & Co's. Express was formed on May 31, 1860 by C.S. Hinckley and John Sowers. Originally it operated to the mountain mining sites in conjunction with COC&PP for onward carriage. By August 15, 1860 it was in competition with the COC&PP using Western Stage Company stages for carriage east of Denver. The route was from the mining towns, via Denver City and Fort Kearney, to Omaha City, Nebraska Territory. The company was purchased by the COC&PP on May 11, 1861.

## Transcontinental Pony Express Route



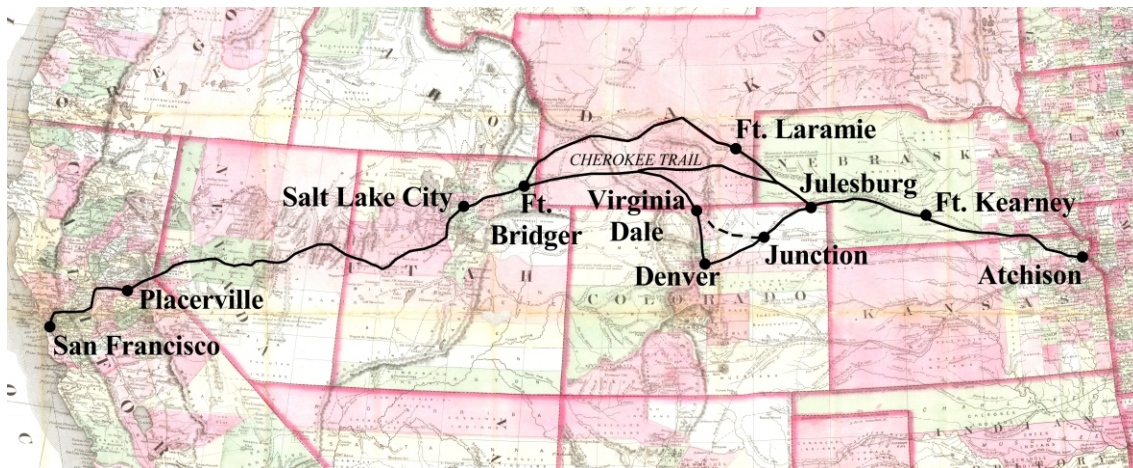
The transcontinental Pony Express is one of the most famous institutions in the history of the American West. It first captured the popular imagination while it operated between April 3, 1860 and October 26, 1861, and has continued to do so ever since. From a postal history perspective, the Pony Express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

The idea for a transcontinental Pony Express began in 1859 when William Russell devised a scheme to transport mail rapidly between California and Missouri using relays of horse mounted riders. Russell persuaded his two partners, Alexander Majors and William Waddell, to institute a ten-day Pony Express private mail service between St. Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento, California. As a demonstration of the viability of carrying mail on the Central Route the Pony Express was a huge success. However, as a business venture, it was a miserable failure, with Russell and his partners incurring large losses. From July 1, 1861, when the Overland Mail Company commenced their daily mail service, the pony express was a contractually mandated premium service.

### Summary of the Operational Phases

- I. Operated by the Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Company as a private express (Eastbound April 3, 1860 to April 14, 1861; Westbound through March 31, 1861)
- II. Operated as a joint private operation of the Overland Mail Company and the Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Company with Wells Fargo acting as agent (Eastbound April 15 through June 30, 1861; Westbound April 15 through June 30, 1861)
- III. A government mandated premium postal service operated by the Overland Mail Company in conjunction with their daily overland mail. Wells Fargo provided private service between San Francisco and Placerville (Eastbound July 1 through October 26, 1861; Westbound through October 31, 1861)

## 1861 Placerville to Missouri (Central Overland) Route



On March 12, 1861 a contract for overland mail service, via the central route as then in use by the Pony Express, was awarded to the Overland Mail Company (OMC). The contract for route #10,773 called for letter mail service six days a week, with additional mail matter to be carried on a weight-available basis. The new service schedule commenced on July 1, 1861 with mail departures from Placerville, California and Saint Joseph, Missouri. In September 1861 the eastern terminal was changed to Atchison, Kansas. Branch service to Denver was inaugurated, and the first direct contract mail from Santa Fe to Denver arrived.

The OMC divided the operational control of the route. The Central Overland & Pikes Peak Express (COC&PP) handled the mails east of Salt Lake City, and Wells, Fargo and Company handled the mails west of Salt Lake City. Ben Holladay purchased the COC&PP on March 21, 1862 and renamed it the Overland Stage Company.

In July 1862, following Indian depredations, the post office ordered the OMC to relocate the section of the route between Ft. Bridger and Julesburg to the Cherokee Trail south of Fort Laramie. Indian troubles in this area forced closure of the new route for much of August and September 1862 and for short periods in 1863. In 1864, additional Indian troubles closed the route for a longer period in August and September and service was not normalized through Julesburg until March 2, 1865. During the most severe of these disruptions mail from New York and San Francisco was diverted to the Via Panama route until the route was able to be safely re-opened. After a further mail stoppage in June 1865, the Indian problems decreased significantly as more military posts were erected along the route.

In 1866 Ben Holladay sold the Overland Stage Company to Wells, Fargo, leaving them in control of the entire route. A new postal contract was signed with Wells, Fargo in October 1868 for service between the termini of the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific railroads. The two termini, originally Benton, Wyoming and Wadsworth, Nevada, were changed on a semi-monthly basis as the railheads approached each other. This shortened the gap that required stage coach service by Wells, Fargo from the initial 837 miles to no service being required after the rails joined at Promontory Point, Utah on May 10, 1869.

## Virginia City Pony Express Route



The regional Virginia City Pony Express should not be confused with the transcontinental pony express of 1860-1861. The Virginia City Pony Express was established by Wells, Fargo and Company in August 1862 to supplement their normal express business between Virginia City, Nevada territory, in the rich Washoe mining area, and San Francisco, California. While the normal express transit time between the two cities was 44 hours the pony express service was advertised as 24 hours. Mail was carried by a pony rider from Virginia City to Placerville where it was put on a train for Sacramento. At Sacramento the mail was placed on a steamboat for conveyance down the Sacramento River and across San Francisco Bay to San Francisco.

Letters to be sent by the Virginia City Pony Express had to be enclosed in a Wells, Fargo franked postal entires. The use of a government postal entire was required for all letters carried outside the government mails. The fee for the pony service was originally ten cents per half ounce in addition to the cost of the franked envelope. A brown 10c adhesive stamp was issued and although the service was advertised to begin on August 11, 1862 the earliest reported use of the stamp is September 1, 1861. In February 1863 the rate was increased to twenty-five cents and the brown stamp was replaced by a 25c blue adhesive. In March 1864 the blue stamp was replaced by a red stamp of the same denomination. From the census of reported uses it appears that service was suspended between July 29 and December 28, 1864. After a brief revival in 1865 the service was permanently suspended on March 2, 1865.

## Bannack City Expresses and 1864 Idaho Mines Routes



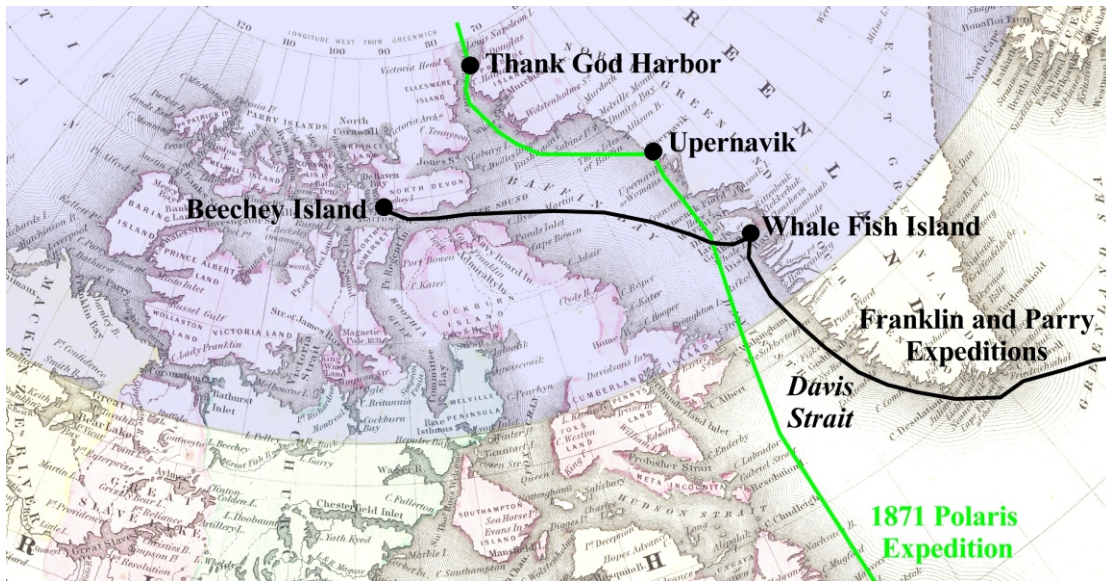
The Bannack City Express (miss-spelled "Bannock" on one of the two devices he used to handstamp mail) was in operation by February 9, 1863, the date of the earliest reported manuscript endorsement on cover. It was operated by A.J. Oliver, E.A. Conover, and Ed House and originally operated from Virginia City, Idaho Territory via Bannack City, Idaho Territory (both present day Montana) to Salt Lake City where it connected with the government overland mail line. The company operated by coach taking passengers and goods as well as mail. By September 1864 they were operating tri-weekly and included service, via Deer Lodge, to as far north at Kootenai, close to the Canadian border. In the winter of 1864/1865 the service required sleighs and some of their northern routes were eliminated as unproductive. A. J. Oliver is reported to have sold his express to Holladay in 1866.

The Fort Bridger And Bannack City Express was organized by Frank Lowe in 1863 and operated as a pony express. It operated between the overland mail route post office at Fort Bridger, Utah Territory and Bannack City, Idaho Territory by way of Virginia City. Lowe served as one of the two riders carrying mail to Soda Springs where it was turned over to Jim Roupe for onward trip to Bannack City. Mails departed on a weekly basis every Monday from both termini. Service from Fort Bridger was advertised in June 1863 as: "Letters in stamped envelopes fifty cents each" but an August 1863 inbound letter carried by express shows a 75 cent collect rate. The express appears to have operated only during the summer of that year.

At least one additional express, Peabody and Caldwell Express, operated in the same area as the previous two companies but little information is available.

In March 1864 a Ben Holladay and his Overland Mail & Express Company and received a government contract for service between Salt Lake City and Walla Walla, Washington Territory, which already had mail service to Portland. This was a thrice weekly service to commence on July 1, 1864. At the same time a contract for a branch service between the Bannack City mines connecting at Ft. Hall to Holladay's overland route was awarded to E.S. Alvord of the Western Stage Company.

## Arctic Explorations



Map of Arctic Exploration, 1824-1871

British Arctic explorers Sir John Franklin and Sir William Edward Parry made several expeditions into the Arctic circle in the first half of the nineteenth century. Franklin's first survey expedition in 1819 was overland from Hudson's Bay, his second in 1823 was on the Mackenzie River. In 1845 he led a much larger expedition in a search for a Northwest Passage. This last expedition departed England on May 19, 1845 onboard steamer HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror* with a crew of 24 officer and 110 men. The expedition was last sighted on 26 July 1845, when the whaler *Prince of Wales* encountered the steamers in Lancaster Sound near Beechey Island.

Sir William Edward Parry accompanied Sir John Ross in an 1818 expedition to the Arctic and in 1820 he commanded an expedition with HMS *Griper* and HMS *Hecla* that accomplished more than half the journey from Greenland to the Bering Strait. A second trip in 1821 did not advance the previous progress and he returned to England in 1823.

Parry returned in 1824 (shown in black on map above) with the HMS *Hecla* and HMS *Fury* to find a passage through Prince Regent Inlet. After the *Fury* grounded and was abandoned, the *Hecla* returned to England. With a further expedition in 1827 he reached the record latitude of 82°45'N.

In 1871 an American expedition (shown in green on map above) led by Charles Francis Hall onboard the USS *Polaris* attempted to be the first expedition to reach the North Pole. Although it failed its main objective it was able to reach 82°29'N latitude, a record at the time. After the death of Hall while wintering at Thank God Harbor, the damaged *Polaris* was run aground and wrecked near Etah, Greenland, in October 1872 and the remaining crew were rescued in the summer.