

Western Expresses

Western Expresses were private individuals or companies that operated west of the Mississippi River and carried letter mail between cities, mining camps, and other settlements. This group of companies became prominent after 1849. Letter mail was handled by them to areas and towns that did not have established post offices and hence the carriage did not contravene any postal laws that prohibited mail carried privately on postal routes. Although the carriage of letter mail was usually a component of their business, many of these companies also handled gold, parcels, and some even provided banking services. Some issued adhesive stamps for premium services or sold government postal entires that bore an additional frank to indicate prepayment of express fees. Western Expresses came into prominence during the California gold rush and were in their heyday in the 1850's and 1860's.



The cities of Marysville, Sacramento, and Stockton acted as base towns for many of the smaller express feeders into the mining regions of inland California. These base towns were themselves fed from San Francisco.

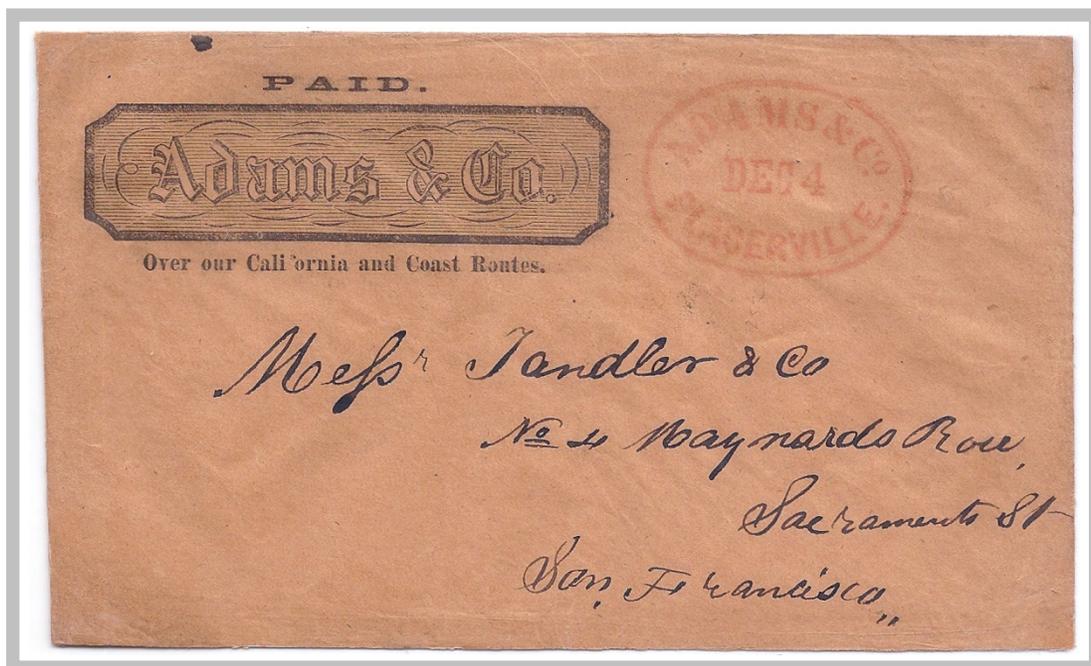
Western Expresses

Adams & Company - Sep, 1849 to Feb 23, 1855

Adams & Company is believed to have been the first express to offer a printed frank on an envelope, in late 1854. Only a handful of these franks are known used during the Adams period of operation, all from late 1854 or early 1855. A number of additional ones are known used as regular envelopes following Adams failure in Feb, 1855; however, they are not considered as Adams usages. This wood block frank was undoubtedly copied by Wells Fargo for use as their initial printed frank.



PAID Adams & Co., Over our California and Coast Routes with Adams & Co. San Francisco Aug 26 (1854) hand stamp to San Jose. *Only known example with the frank printed vertically at left used during Adams period of operation.*

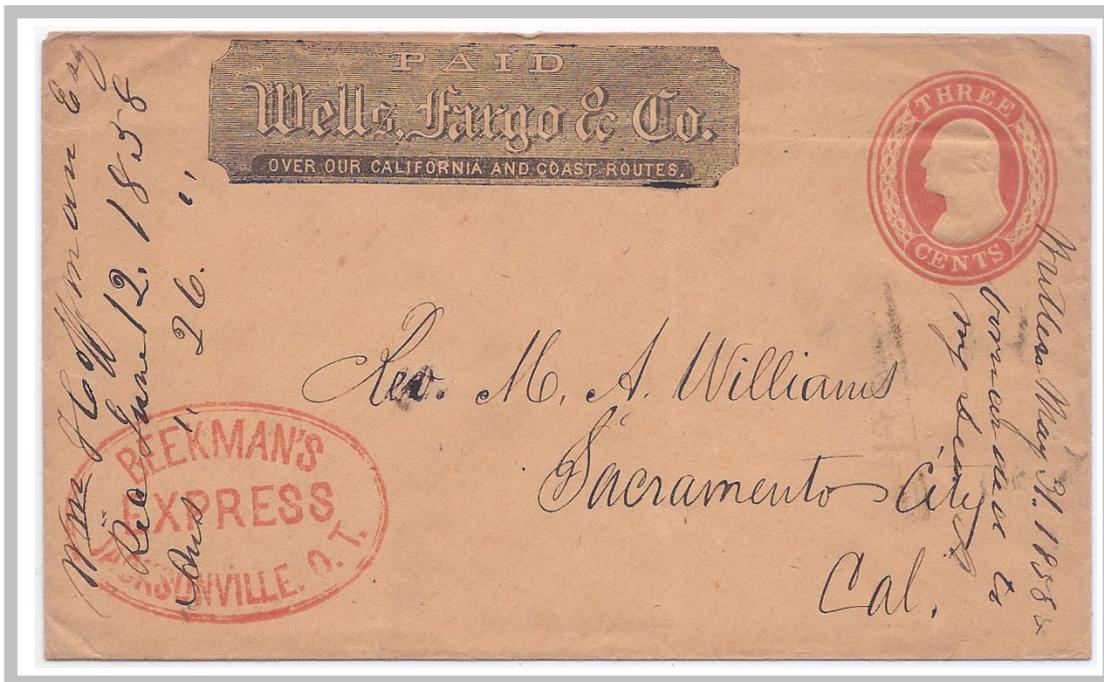


PAID Adams & Co., Over our California and Coast Routes with Adams & Co. Placerville Dec 4 (1854) hand stamp to San Francisco.

Western Expresses

**Beekman's Express – 1855 to Nov 16, 1858
and Dec 31, 1859 to 1863**

Cornelius Beekman started his express after Adams & Co.'s failure in 1855 from a base at Jacksonville in Oregon Territory. Routes ran to Yreka, Crescent City and Roseburg, Oregon. He connected with Wells Fargo at Yreka and reportedly with Tracy at Jacksonville. From Nov, 1858 to Dec, 1859 William Hoffman, C.C. Beekman's future father-in-law, ran the express under his name while Beekman was "back east". Beekman sold out to Wells Fargo in 1863, becoming their agent at Jacksonville.



By **Beekman's Express Jacksonville O.T.** with May 31 1858 docketing to Yreka where it was exchanged with Wells Fargo for delivery to Sacramento City.

BEEKMAN'S EXPRESS

LEAVES Jacksonville every other day for Yreka, connecting with

Wells, Fargo & Co.,

at that place, for all parts of California, the Atlantic States, and Europe.

SIGHT BILLS OF EXCHANGE

procured, payable in any of the Atlantic cities, Canadas, or Europe.

GOLD DUST BOUGHT.

LETTERS

procured from any Express or Post Office in California.

Collections made, and everything appertaining to the Express business promptly attended to.

Particular attention paid to filling orders of every description, at Yreka, or any point below.

laughlf C. C. BEEKMAN.

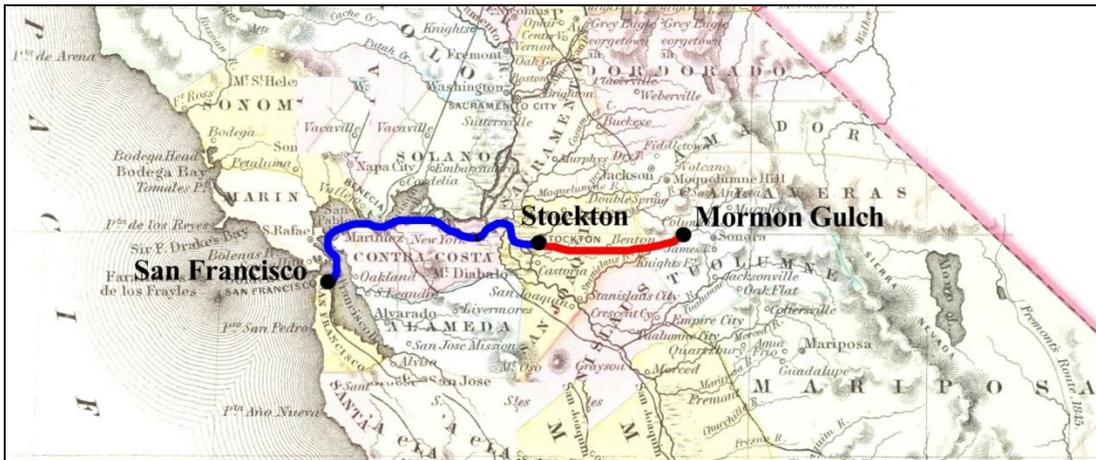


Above: Cornelius Beekman, from the Wells Fargo Archives.

Left: from the *Jacksonville Herald*, Oct 10, 1857



- ca Oct, 1851 by **Newell & Co's Express San Francisco** to Stockton
- **Forwarded by Browns Express** from Stockton to “Mormon Gulch, near Tuttletown”
- Brown collected \$2.00 for delivery, as indicated by two strikes of the **\$1.** express rate marking, with one-half paid to Newell



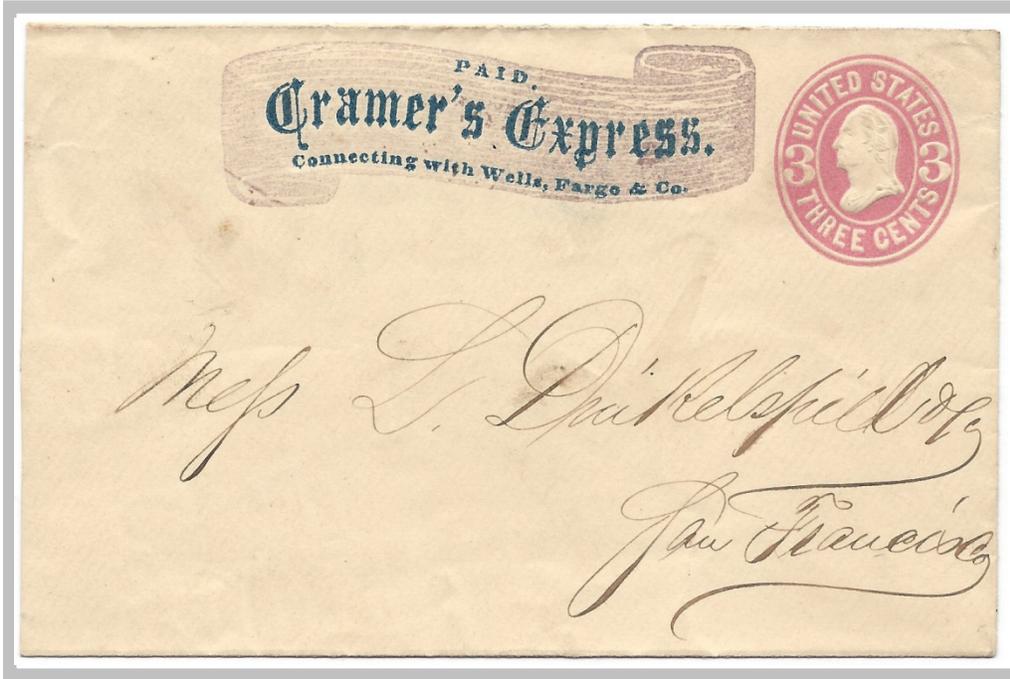
Newell & Co's Express route in blue, **Brown's Express route in red**

L. W. Newell and E. W. Colt, both formerly partners in Todd & Co, announced Newell & Co's Express on Oct 22, 1851. The express operated between San Francisco and Stockton by steamboat as well as by steamer to Oregon. They connected with Browns for service to the southern mines near Stockton. In Jul, 1853 they sold out to Adams & Co.

Western Expresses

Cramer's Express – 1867 to August, 1870

Charles Cramer's Express and Stage Line ran from Susanville, California to Reno, Nevada "by way of Janesville, Milford, Long Valley, Summit House, and Pea Vine." Cramer's connected with Wells Fargo at Reno. Seven partnerships were noted in Susanville's weekly newspaper *The Sage Brush* from Feb, 1868 to Aug, 1870, at which time Thomes & Skadan's Stage Line purchased Cramer's Susanville/Reno line.



PAID Cramer's Express Connecting with Wells, Fargo & Co. printed frank envelope, by Cramer's to Reno; exchanged with Wells Fargo at Reno for delivery to San Francisco.



Likely a used leftover of **Cramer's Express**, carried by US Post Office from Susanville, Cal. Feb 27, 1871 to San Francisco.

Leroy Crary ran a tri-weekly stage service between Nevada City and Dutch Flat, with stops at You Bet and Little York, starting in the fall of 1873. A letter express service connected with Wells Fargo at Nevada City. The service was sold to Broadwell's Stage & Express Line in the winter of 1873.



By Leroy Crary's Nevada and Dutch Flat Stage and Express Line to Nevada City; by **Wells Fargo Nevada Jan 23** (1874) for delivery to Smartsville. *The only known example from this short-lived express.*

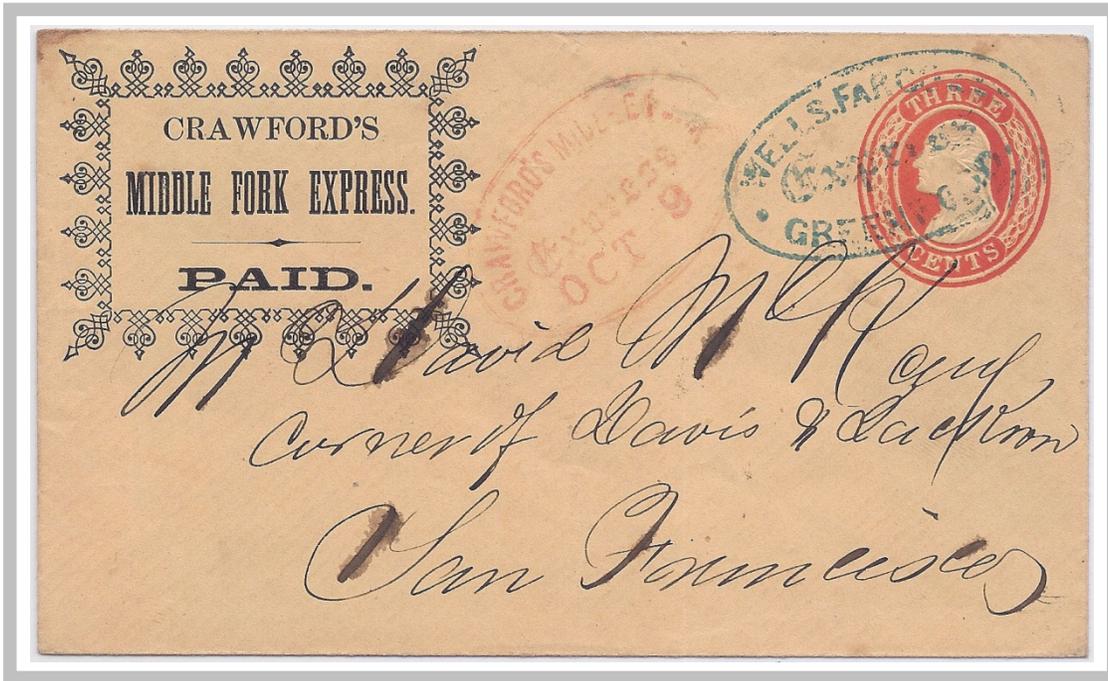


Nevada City from the west (1866)

Western Expresses

Crawford's Middle Fork Express – 1857 to 1859

Ellison Lassell Crawford formed Crawford's Middle Fork Express and is thought to have served the mining camps along the Middle Fork of the American River and its tributary, the Rubicon River, from a base at Greenwood. They connected with Wells Fargo at Greenwood.

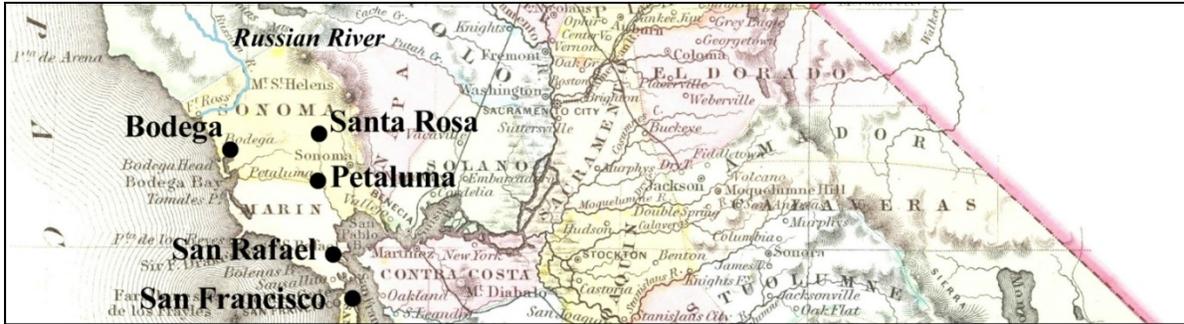


By **Crawford's Middle Fork Express Oct 9** from the mining camps to Greenwood; by **Wells, Fargo & Co. Express Greenwood** to San Francisco.

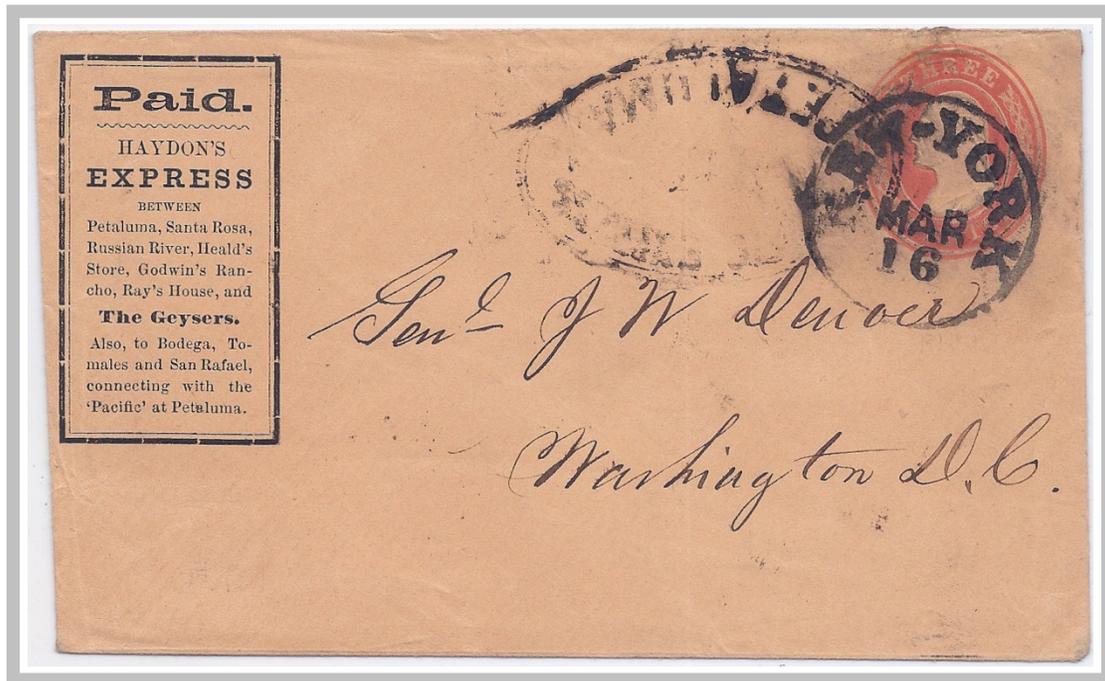


By post office from **Big Oak Flat, Cal Oct 12** to Greenwood; then by **Crawford's Middle Fork Express** with their red handstamp (one of only five known examples of this marking) for delivery to the mining camps.

S. C. Haydon, a merchant in Petaluma, established his express to handle mail in Sonoma and Marin County towns north of San Francisco. The text on his printed frank reads: "Between Petaluma, Santa Rosa, Russian River, Heald's Store, Godwin's Rancho, Ray's House, and The Geysers. Also, to Bodega, Tomales and San Rafael, connecting with the 'Pacific' (express) at Petaluma."



Haydon's Express primary offices in relation to San Francisco



- **PAID Haydon's Express** from one of the locations noted on the printed frank to Petaluma in Feb, 1856
- By **Pacific Express Petaluma** to San Francisco
- Vanderbilt Line steamer *Uncle Sam*, depart San Francisco Feb 20, 1856, arrive San Juan del Sur Mar 2, 1856
- Three days across Nicaragua to San Juan del Norte
- Vanderbilt line steamer *Northern Light*, depart San Juan del Norte Mar 5, 1856, arrive New York Mar 13, 1856
- By government mails from **New York Mar 16** (1856) to Washington, D.C.

The only reported example of a Haydon's Express cover.

Western Expresses

Hervey's Express – 1858 to 1860

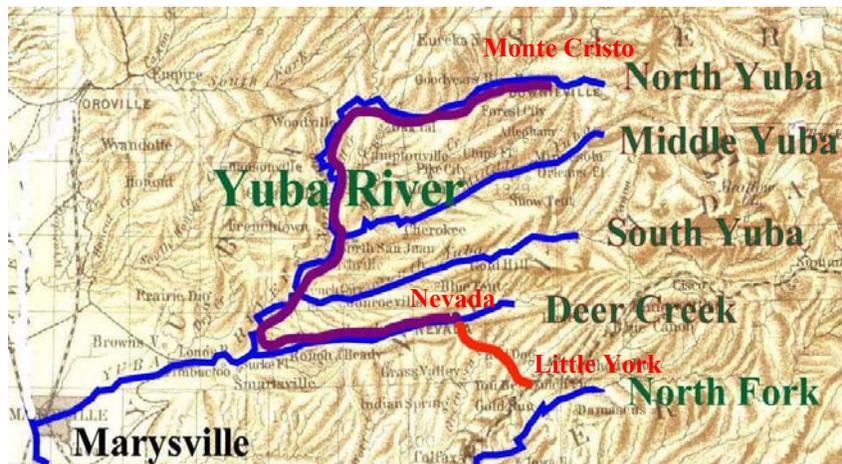
Samuel Hervey's express ran from Nevada City into the surrounding area. It was most likely a single man feeder line into Nevada City from Red Dog and Dutch Flat.



By Langton's from **Monte Cristo** to Nevada City; exchanged with **S. Hervey's Express Nevada, Cal** to Little York. Enclosed letter datelined *Monte Cristo June 29th/56* transcribed, in part, below. *One of only two known examples of Hervey's Express usages, the other being on a newspaper.*



... We have built a Shanty and have just begun to keep house in true California Style. This place is only 5 miles from Downieville and I expect will be some day a big town... Jane is most tired out with her journey and 30 miles of mule riding... Yours truly... G. W. Greeley



Monte Cristo was WNW of Downieville on the North Fork of the Yuba River. Little York was a mining camp between You Bet and Dutch Flat near the North Fork of the American River.

Samuel W. Langton operated as an express man, either alone or in various partnerships from 1850 until 1864. He formed Langton & Brother's Express with his brother in November 1853. They operated from Marysville up the Yuba River to Nevada City and Downieville. The brothers sold out to Adams Express on Feb 21, 1855, just two days before Adams collapsed..



Rocky Hill, Ky 20th July (1854) by government mails to Nevada City two 3¢ 1851 issue adhesives prepaying the 6¢ rate in effect for distances >3000 miles; **Forwarded by Langton & Bro's Express Nevada** (City) to “New Orleans Flat, Alta Cal.”

**FORWARDED BY
Langton & Bro's Express
NEVADA.**



Map showing the route from Nevada City post office to New Orleans flat

Western Expresses

Panamint Pony Express – Sep, 1874 to Nov, 1874

This short-lived express ran between the mining district of Panamint, Inyo County, California through the Cajon Pass to San Bernardino, a distance of about 200 miles.



By **Panamint Pony Express via San Bernardino Paid 25 Cents** in their printed frank envelope to San Bernardino; US mail **San Bernardino Nov 5** (1874) to Chester, Penna. Information printed on verso shown below *The only known used example from this express.*

These Envelopes to be had
 At office of S. V. M. & W. Co. Panamint.
 “ Meyerstein & Co., S. Bernardino
 “ Meyerstein & Winter, L. Angeles,
 “ Meyerstein & Lowenberg,
 No. 25 Sansome Street, S. F.
 “ S. V. M. & W. Co., 330 Pine Street,
 San Francisco.

PONY EXPRESS TO PANAMINT.
 CARRYING LETTERS THROUGH
 from SAN BERNARDINO to PANAMINT IN
 THIRTY-SIX HOURS.
 No Letters carried unless enclosed in the Company's
 Stamped Envelope, to be had at
Surprise Valley Mill and Water Co's Office,
 025-1m 390 PINE STREET, S. F.

Oct 25, 1874 ad from the *Sacramento Daily Union*

MESSRS. JONES and STEWART have established a pony-express between San Bernardino and the Panamint Mines. By means of relays of six horses distributed along the route, they expect to reduce the time between the two points to twenty-four hours. Thus a message may be sent to San Bernardino by telegraph and thence by pony-express on to Panamint in a day and night. We presume the pony will carry letters and small packages, and thus become a public convenience.

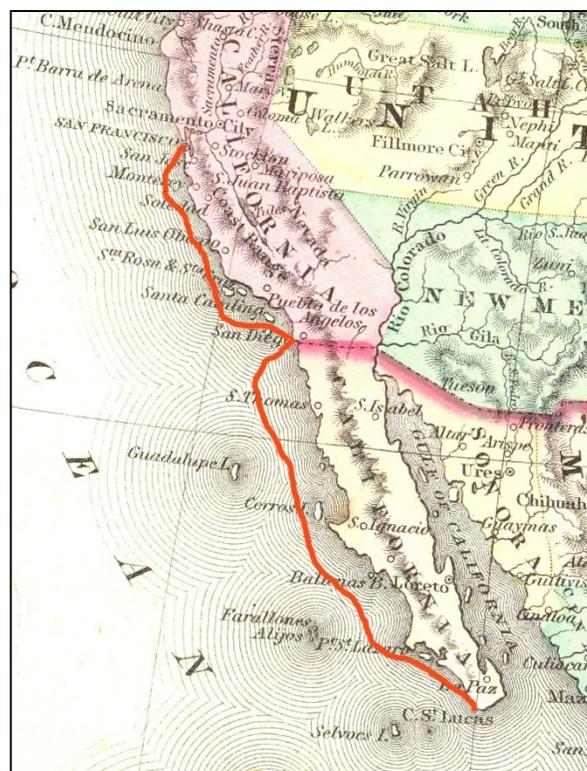
Articles from the *Los Angeles Herald* note the establishment of this express (Sep 15, 1874, at left) and discontinuance (Nov 29, 1874, at right)

The pony-express which was started between San Bernardino and Panamint has been discontinued, as it failed to pay expenses. The mail matter from San Bernardino to the new mining district now comes to Los Angeles and reaches its destination via Bakersfield.

Using coastal steamers, Charles M. Peterson ran an express service between San Francisco and La Paz, Mexico. He established an office in Henry Payot's Book Store in San Francisco. Peterson may also have operated a pony/mule service between the cities of Cape San Lucas and La Paz in Mexico.



By **Peterson's Lower California Express** from (Cape) *San Lucas* Baja California (Mexico) to San Francisco with **Free** notation. Docketed *Cape St. Lucas* Apr 11, 1863 at left. The handstamp **Estafeta de Baja California** translates as "Express of Lower California." One of only two known Peterson's label covers.



Chandler Reticker (sometimes erroneously reported as Charles) operated a pony express in early 1871 to/from the Timmins Mining District south of Salt Lake City; exchanging mail with Wells, Fargo & Co. at Salt Lake City.



By **Reticker's. Poney. Express** to Salt Lake City; exchanged with **Wells, Fargo & Co. Salt Lake City U.T. Mar 10** (1871) to San Francisco. Merchants handstamp on verso "**A. T. Green San Francisco. Mar 13, 1871**".

MORE GALENA.—By Reticker's express we learn that discoveries recently made in the Timmins district, some seventy to eighty miles south, have assayed, from croppings, in one instance, \$195 in silver to the ton with a fair average of galena, and in another instance, \$85 to the ton. Parties left town yesterday for the new district, and we expect more details in a few days.—[Salt Lake Herald, 21st.

The April 25, 1871 Carson City, Nevada *Daily State Register* reprinted this article from the April 21st *Salt Lake Herald*.

Henry L. Spargur operated an express from Oroville to Quincy which, as the name would imply, continued on to Honey Lake. R. C. Gridley's express operated over this same route. It is not clear if Spargur acquired Gridley's operation, or if they were competitors.



Spargur's Honey Lake Express PAID from Honey Lake to Quincy; by post office Quincy, Cal Jul 6 with *Paid 10c* to Boston with sender's directive "*via Panama*" (versus overland).

HORSE STEALING.—We learn that a man named Bowman, says the *Plumas Standard*, familiarly known as "Doc." appropriated a horse belonging to Henry L. Spargur, of Honey Lake, and another owned by one Cunningham, who was on his road to Humboldt, and decamped. He has not yet been taken, and the impression is that he has made tracks for Salmon river.

Very few newspaper references could be found for Henry L. Spargur. One of the few was in the June 14, 1862 *Sacramento Daily Union*, which noted a horse had been stolen from him at Honey Lake.

Stewart & Jones express ran a line from Meadow Lake to the Dutch Flat/Gold Run mining area. Gold deposits at Meadow Lake created one of the last gold rushes in the Sierras. The area is 7000 feet above sea level and little activity is possible once the snows start to fall. The summer of 1865 marked the operating period for this express, as the weather and limited gold deposits ended most activity in the area by 1868.



By **Stewart & Jones' Meadow Lake Express PAID** to Gold Run; by United States Post Office from **Gold Run, Cal Nov x4** to Virginia City, Nevada.. *This is the unique example known used from this express company.*



Meadow Lake, CA, ca1868

After working with Meek serving the Feather River mines, Joseph Numa Vera became a partner in Meek & Power's Express. Meek sold out to Vera in 1855 and became a partner in Singer, Meek & Co's Feather River Express. Vera operated to Oroville where he connected with Wells, Fargo and evidently quit the business circa 1857.



circa 1855 from the Feather River mines by **Vera's Express PAID** to Oroville, "**Paid Pollard 4/-**" rate paid to agent for valuable letter; by **Wells Fargo & Co's Express Oroville, Cal.** with their label (money letter) to Marysville; entire folded over at right and sealed with red wax seal (now unfolded).



Vera's express route shown in red, Wells Fargo & Co. carriage in blue