

ASTORIA - FIRST WESTERN POST OFFICE

Astoria Oregon, at the mouth of the Columbia River, was established in 1811 by John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company. Astoria became the transit port for early northwest ship mail, both before and after post offices were established.

Exhibit is in three sections: Before Post Office Mail - 1830 to 1846 (2-5)
Post Office Mail - 1847 to 1853 (6-11)
Express Company Mail - 1851 to 1865 (12-16)

Quebec, Canada
24 - 26 Nov 1801
"Via New York"

"This goes by way of
Halifax tomorrow"
(private carriage)

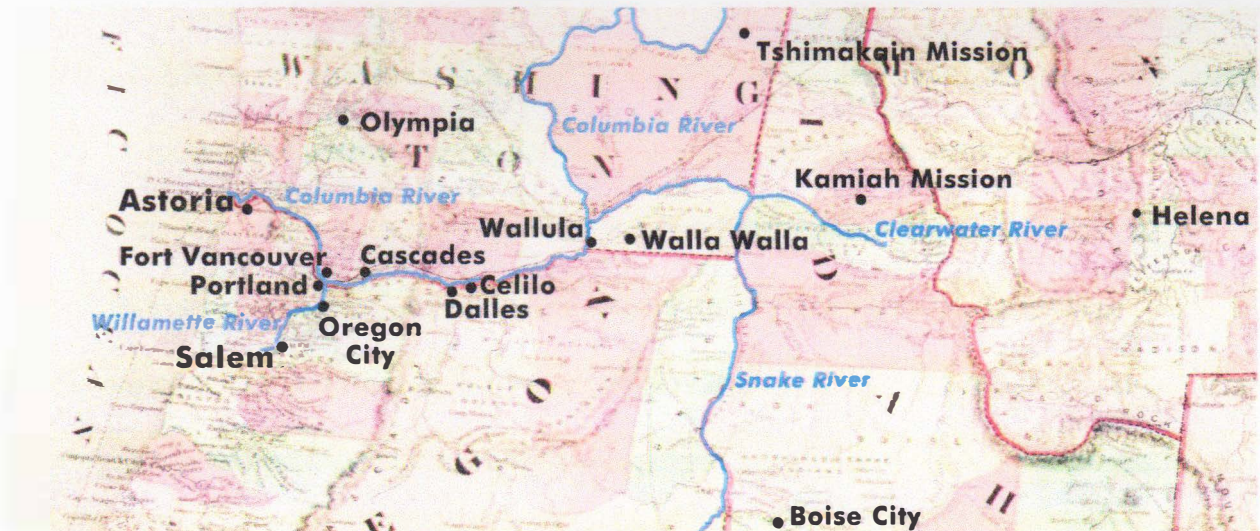
"N York Dec 16
1801 - "Recd &
forwd by your Ob.
Svt. J.J. Astor"

New York
Falmouth Packet
"Lord Chesterfield"
19 Dec 1801

London
17 Jan 1802
2/2 due in Scotland



In 1811, Astor's ship "Tonquin" arrived at the mouth of the Columbia River and soon met Astor's overland party to found Fort Astoria. In 1813, during the War of 1812, they sold their furs and fort to Britain's Northwest Company.



Points of interest for the following fifteen pages

1830, 1834 - Fur Trade Mail

Fort Vancouver
9 Oct 1830,
Hudson's Bay Co.
sailing ship "Eagle"

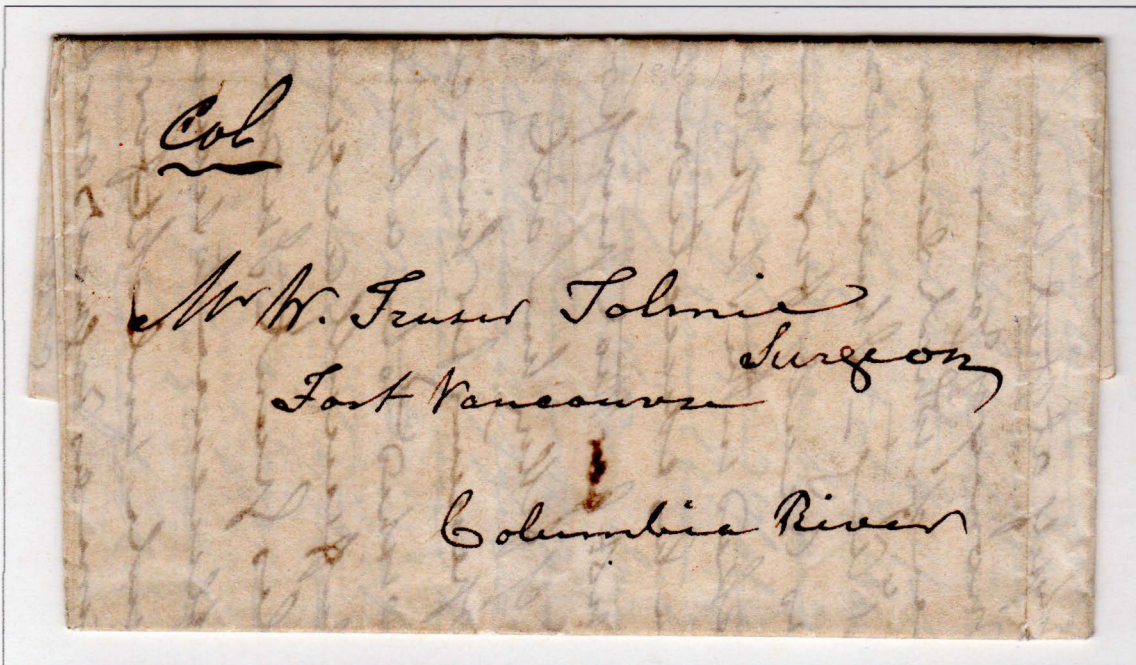
Via Astoria, then around
the Horn to Deal, U.K.
"Deal Ship Letter"

Overland to London
18 Ap 1831 backstamp
1/4 pence due

(illustrated in "Mails of
the Westward Expansion,
1803 to 1861", by
Stephen Walske and
Richard Frajola)



First mate Robert Young describes seeing wreck of the HBC "Isabella" just west of Astoria.
Earliest Pacific Northwest cover in private hands



London
9 Dec 1834
"Col" for
Columbia District
(three recorded)

HBC ship
"Ganymede"
10 Dec 1834,
Via Cape Horn

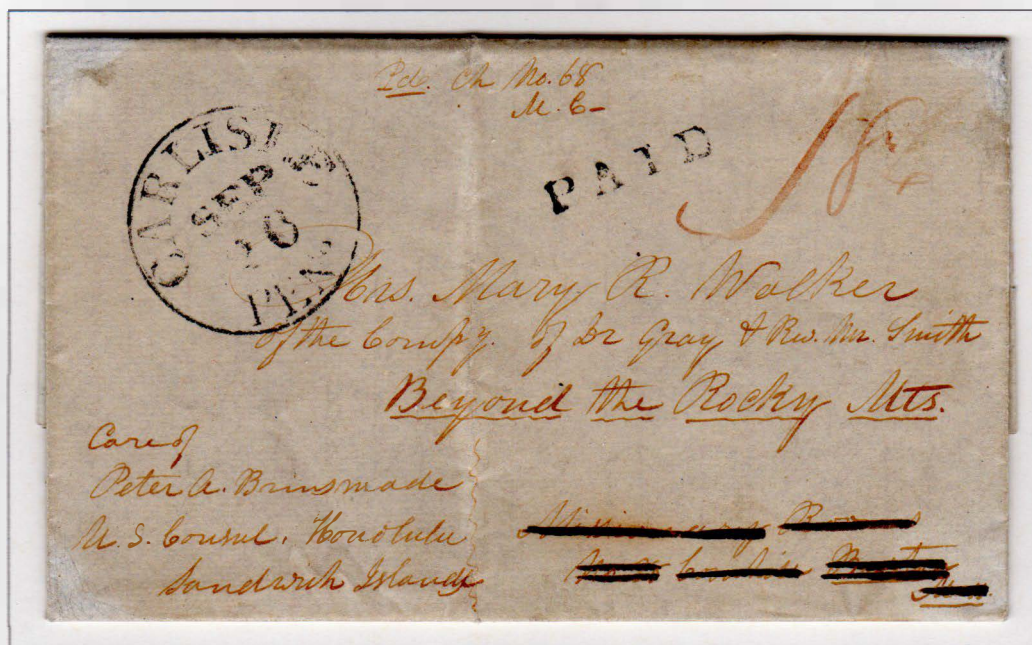
Arrived Honolulu
10 June 1835

Depart Honolulu
21 June 1835

Via Astoria to
Fort Vancouver
27 July 1835

"Col" is considered the first routing marking for mail to the Pacific Northwest.
(illustrated in "Mails of the Western Expansion, 1803 to 1861", Walske and Frajola)

1838, 1840 - Missionary Mail Via Cape Horn



Carlisle Pennsylvania
26 Sep 1838,
"Care of Peter
Brinsmade, U.S, Consul
Sandwich Islands",
18¾ cents paid to
"Missionary Rooms,
No. 28 Cornhill
Boston MA" (deleted)

Private ship "Fama" via
Cape Horn to Honolulu

"Thomas Perkins"
to Astoria,
Arrived 6 April 1839,
By canoe up
Columbia River to
Tshimakain Mission

Mary Walker crossed the plains in 1838, establishing Tshimakain Mission north of Spokane, now in Washington State. Her diary records receiving this letter from a teacher at Dickinson College on 5 September 1839. Note address: "Mrs. Mary R. Walker, of the Compy. of Dr. Gray & Rev. Mr. Smith, Beyond the Rocky Mountains." (illustrated in "Mails of the Westward Expansion")

"Kamiah, Oregon Terr.
21 Aug. 1840",
Canoe down Clearwater,
Snake and Columbia
Rivers to Astoria

HBC "Columbia" to
Honolulu, 2 Jan 1841

Private sailing ship
around Horn to
Philadelphia, "SHIP"
30 Sep 1840

20¾ cents collect
postage to Connecticut



Kamiah Mission was established in 1838 near the Clearwater River in what is now Idaho with Asa Smith in charge. Smith tells of his problems converting natives to Christianity and mission was closed in late 1840. Very little mail has survived.

1841, from "Boston Trader" via Mexico

Fort Vancouver
9 June 1841

Letter from Samuel
Varney, Yankee
Trader and Captain
of Bark "Angola"

"Wave" via Astoria
to Honolulu,
arriving on
20 July 1841

5 August 1841
"Joseph Peabody"
to Mazatlan

Mexican overland
mail to Vera Cruz,
"Franquedo Vera
Cruz October 26"
handstamp

Bark "Eugenie"
to New York

New York Ship
13 Jan (1842)

Salem, MA
20¾ due for
arriving ship letter
(18¾ postage plus 2
cents for captain)



U.S. Consul in Hawaii arranged payment of 2 Reales Mexican postage. **This is the only recorded Pacific Northwest cover taking this route which ended with the Mexican War of 1846.** Samuel Varney had sold his ship, the "Thomas Perkins", to the U.S. government to replace the "Peacock", wrecked at the mouth of the Columbia during the Wilkes Expedition. Varney purchased the "Angola" with the proceeds.

For more information on the route
across Mexico, see Fred Gregory's
"Hawaii Foreign Mail to 1870"
(this cover illustrated on page 116)



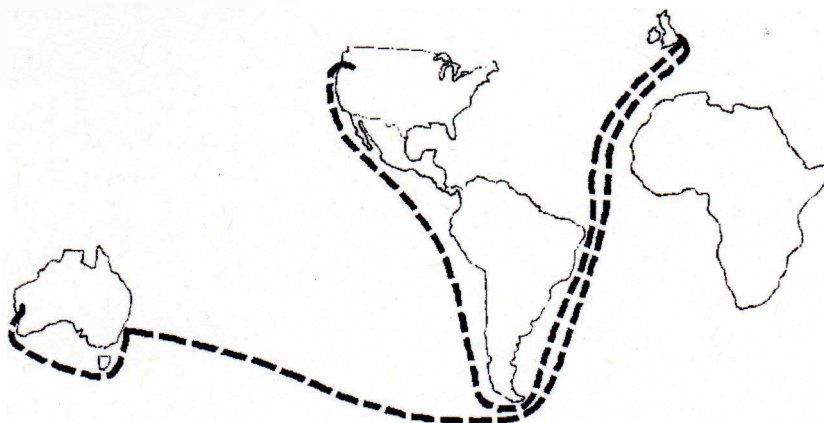
1845, Western Australia around Cape Horn in both Directions

Henry Sewell was one of the first settlers in the Tuality Plains area southwest of Portland. There being no government post offices, Sewell's father in Australia sent letter via London *To the care of the Gentlemen of the Hudson's Bay Company*. Apparently this is the only recorded letter going around the Horn in both directions.



Swan River, 10 Nov 1845, "POST OFFICE GUILDFORD" crown and paid handstamps, Perth Ship Letter handstamp, Coastal ship "Union" to Sydney - Private sailing ship around Cape Horn to London, taking advantage of the prevailing westerly winds - London CDS on reverse - Hudson's Bay Company ship around Horn via Astoria to Fort Vancouver. **About 18 months in transit**

Rates: 6d ship letter charge paid in Western Australia, 8d paid in London by HBC for arriving ship letter, free to Fort Vancouver by HBC, although addressee was not an employee.



1847 - Earliest Recorded Western Post Office Marking

In 1845 Astoria's John Shively traveled east on the Oregon Trail in an effort to become Astoria Postmaster. He was successful in lobbying for the northern U.S. border to be set at the 49th parallel rather than the Columbia River as proposed by the British. In March 1847 Shively was appointed Astoria Postmaster and he returned west, arriving in October.



Letter from Orpha Carter at Willamette Mission, headed "Salem, 11 July 1847"
 Carried privately by horseback to Oregon City, then canoe or sailboat to Astoria
 Postmarked by John Shively "Astoria Oregon" in October 1847
 (Oregon would not become a territory until August 1848))

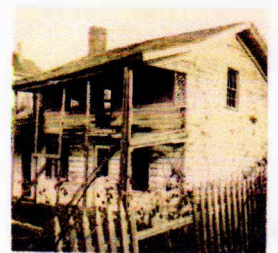
No contract ships available - Sent on private ship "Whiton" departing Astoria in November 1847
 Around Horn to New York, 6 Aug 1848, "7" ship letter postage includes 2¢ for ship captain
Earliest recorded western postmark, but 13 months in transit from letter date



John Shively

To have a functional post office, three things are necessary:

1. A postmaster - in this case John Shively
2. A post office - his house at right which burned in 1906
3. Mail contractors on routes to carry mail to and from post office - Astoria would not have contract ships to and from San Francisco until late 1849 and would not have a contractor for inland mail via the Columbia River, so an efficient post office was virtually impossible.



First post office west of the Rocky Mountains

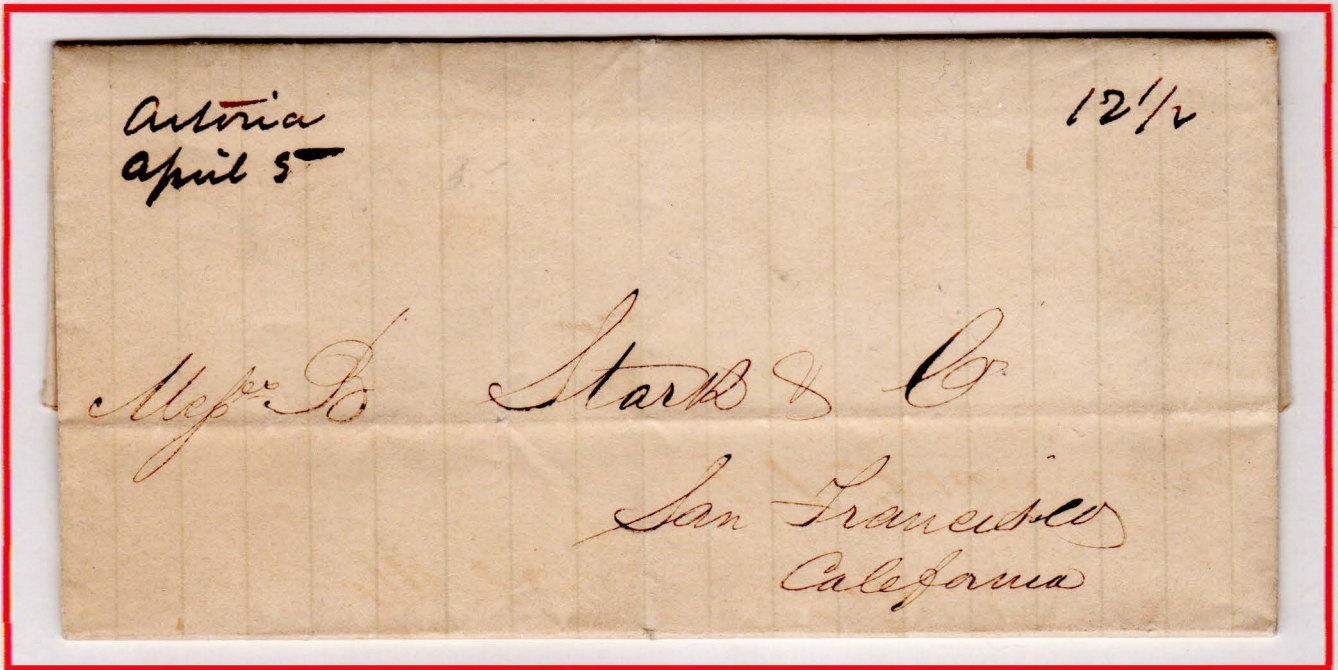
1849, 1850 - West Coast Mail

Astoria
Aug 16 1849
letter heading
"5" (collect)



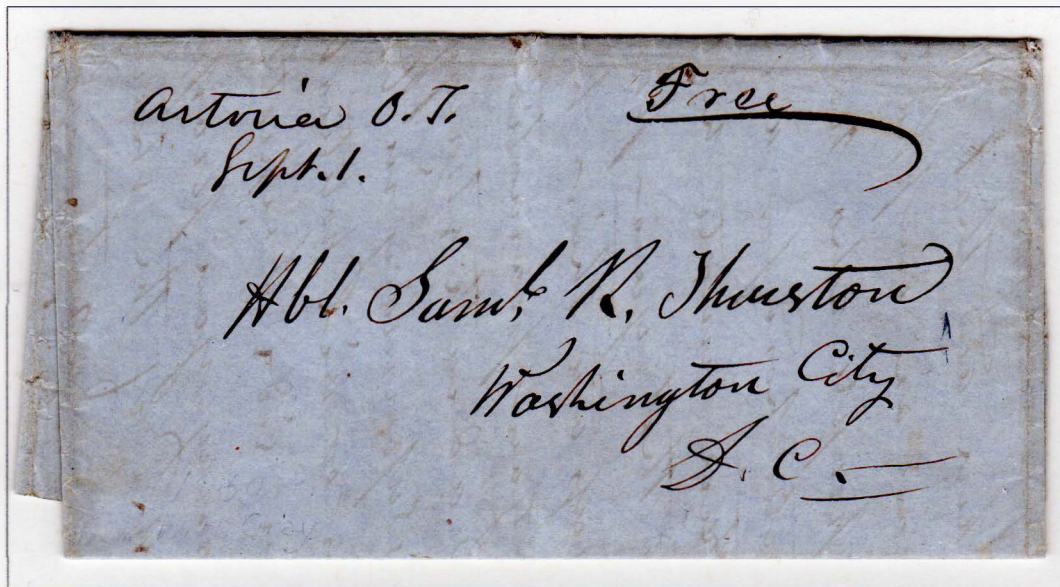
Sailboat on
Columbia and
Willamette Rivers
to Linn City
(now "West Linn"
across Willamette
River from
Oregon City)

1849 postal rates called for a 12½ cent rate for west coast mail (see below), but a 5 cent rate was usually used from the Pacific Northwest before July 1851.



"Oregon City, 28 March 1850" (letter heading) - Private carriage by sailboat to Astoria - "Astoria April 5 - 12½" in handwriting of John Adair, customs collector and second Astoria postmaster - Sailing ship to San Francisco - **Only recorded example of the 12½ cent rate seen from the Pacific Northwest.**

1850, 1851 - Transcontinental Mail Via Panama



Astoria O.T.
 Sept 1 (1850
 letter heading)
 "Free" to member
 of Congress

Steamships to
 San Francisco,
 Panama and
 New York

Overland to
 Washington D.C.

Free mail service was allowed for correspondence to or from Congressmen.

ASTORIA ORgn
 FEB 23 hand-
 stamp (1851
 letter heading)
 "40" cent
 collect rate)

Steamships to
 San Francisco,
 Panama and
 New York

Overland to
 Warren RI



Earliest recorded use of Astoria's first handstamp - Pacific Mail Steamship Co. and U.S. Mail Steamship Co. carried contract mails between Astoria, San Francisco, Panama and New York.

1849, 1851 - To Wurttemberg and to China

*Territory Oregon
Astoria. Bark Steamer
1. 8. August 1849.*

(letter heading)
Private carriage from
Astoria to Oregon City,
8 Sept 1849 ms. postmark,
64 for collect postage

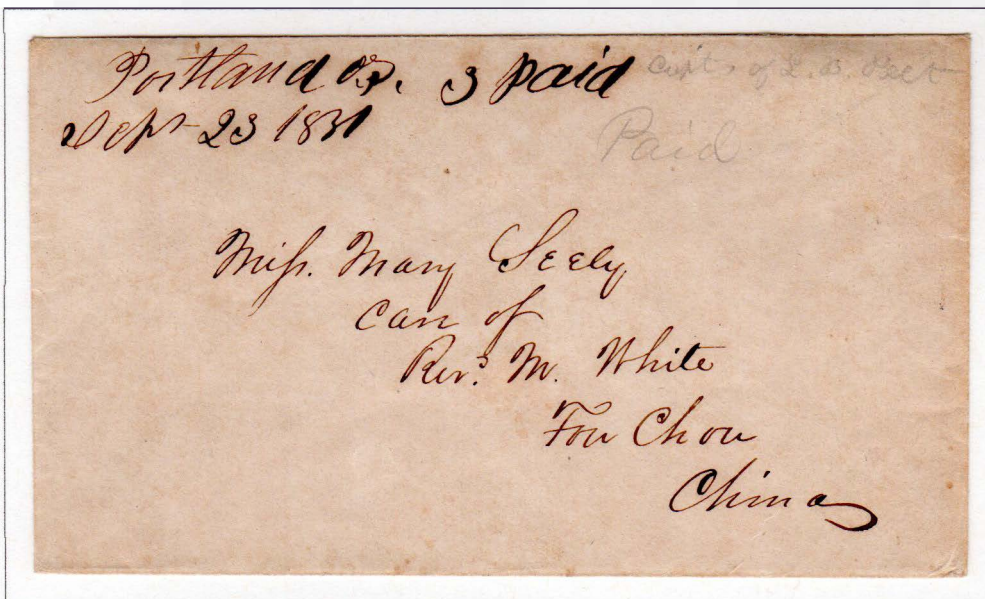
Sailboat or canoe
to Astoria,
Ship to San Francisco,
Via Panama to NY
"34" debit to Bremen

Steamship to Bremen,
overland to Tulingen



Shively had abandoned his Astoria Postmaster position and gone to the California mines, so cover was sent privately to Oregon City, the closest post office. "12^{3/4}" is a Bremen debit to Hanover. Total collect postage was 1 gulden 13 kreuzer (thanks to Dwayne Littauer for rate analysis).

Earliest recorded Pacific Northwest use to continental Europe



Portland O.T.
23 Sep 1851,
"3 paid" for rate
to San Francisco

Via Astoria and
PMSC steamship
"Columbia" to
San Francisco

"Capt. of
Light Bark Peet
Paid" to Canton,
Unrecorded oval
Canton forwarder
marking on reverse

Private ship to
"Fou Chou" China

At this date there was no contract mail service across the Pacific, so cover was held by the San Francisco post office for a departing private ship.

Earliest recorded Pacific Northwest use to Asia

1851, 1853 - Transcontinental Mail Paid with 1851 Orange-Brown Stamps

Philadelphia
6 Nov 1851,
12 cents for
double rate

Overland to
New York,
US Mail Steam-
ship Co. to
Chagres

Across Isthmus
by mule

Pacific Mail
Steamship Co.
"Columbia" from
San Francisco
to Astoria



Philatelic Foundation calls stamps "experimental orange-brown".



Letter written at
Jacksonville in
southern Oregon
by a miner who
had brought
envelope and
stamps from
San Francisco

Mule-train to
Crescent City CA

Ship to Astoria
24 July 1853

Ocean steamships
via SF, Panama
and New York

Overland to
Elyria Ohio

No post office yet at Jacksonville, so letter was given to a packer to take it to Crescent City CA. No post office at Crescent City and no ship going south, so put on a ship going north to mail at first opportunity. Stamps canceled at Astoria with second Astoria datestamp. Illustrated in Coburn's "Letters of Gold".

1851, 1852 - "Way" Mail

San Francisco
18 Sept 1851
(letter heading)
Given dockside
to purser of
PMSC "Columbia"

Out of the mails
to Astoria

"Astoria ORgn,
Sept 23", "Way 6"

PMSC steamboat
"Willamette"
to Portland



Cover was turned over to the purser of the "Columbia" dockside in San Francisco, probably after the post office had closed the mail for that vessel. "Way 6" is the 5 cent collect rate from July 1851 plus the 1 cent "Way" fee paid in Astoria to the delivering ship captain.



Picked up by
non-contract
boat along
Columbia River
at town without
post office

By boat to
Astoria Oregon,
9 Aug (1852)
datestamp,
"Way 6" in ms.
for 5¢ collect
postage plus
1 cent way fee
paid to
ship captain

Steamship to
San Francisco

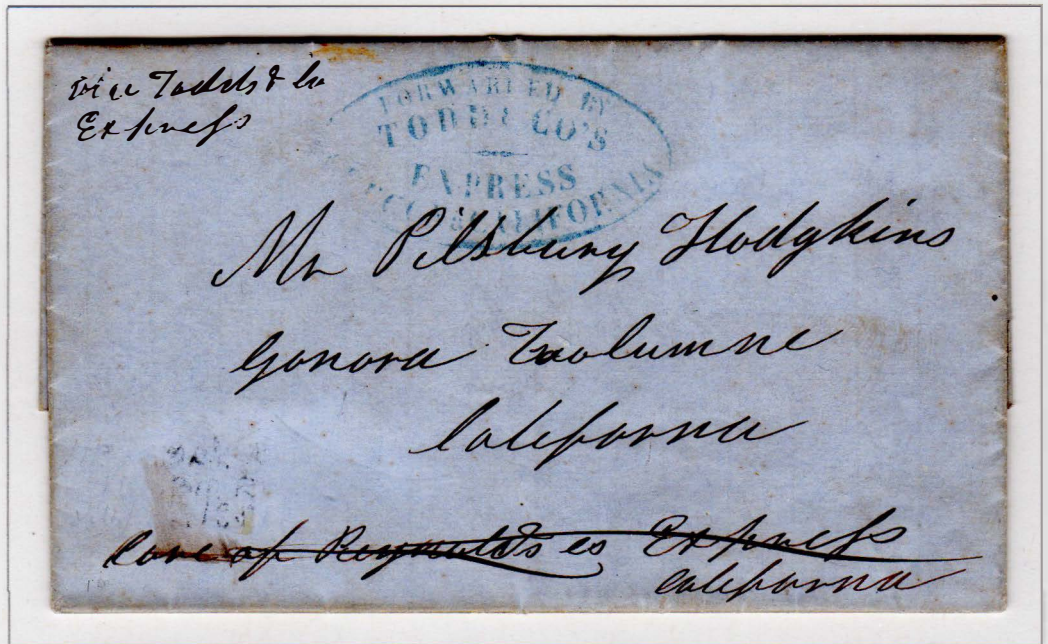
Only recorded "Way" letters from and to the Pacific Northwest

1851, 1852 -Todd & Co., Newell & Co.

Astoria Mills
23 July 1851
(letter heading)
"Via Todd & Co.
Express",
TODD & CO'S
OREGON &
CALIFORNIA
EXPRESS oval,
50 cent charge

PMSC steamship
to San Francisco

Overland to
Sonora



Astoria Mills Columbia River July 23rd 1851

One of two recorded covers with this Todd's Express oval marking



Portland
1 Nov 1851
(letter heading)
NEWELL & CO'S
EXPRESS
OREGON
in oval

Steamboat
"Willamette"
to Astoria

Steamship
"Columbia" to
San Francisco

**Only recorded example of the Newell & Co. Oregon marking
illustrated in "Oregon Express Companies"**

1853, 1854 - Adams Express

Portland
(circa 1853)
Adams & Co's
Express
Portland O.T.
"rope" oval h/s,
PAID oval for 50
cent express rate

PMSC steamboat
"Willamette"
to Astoria

PMSC steamship
"Columbia"
to San Francisco

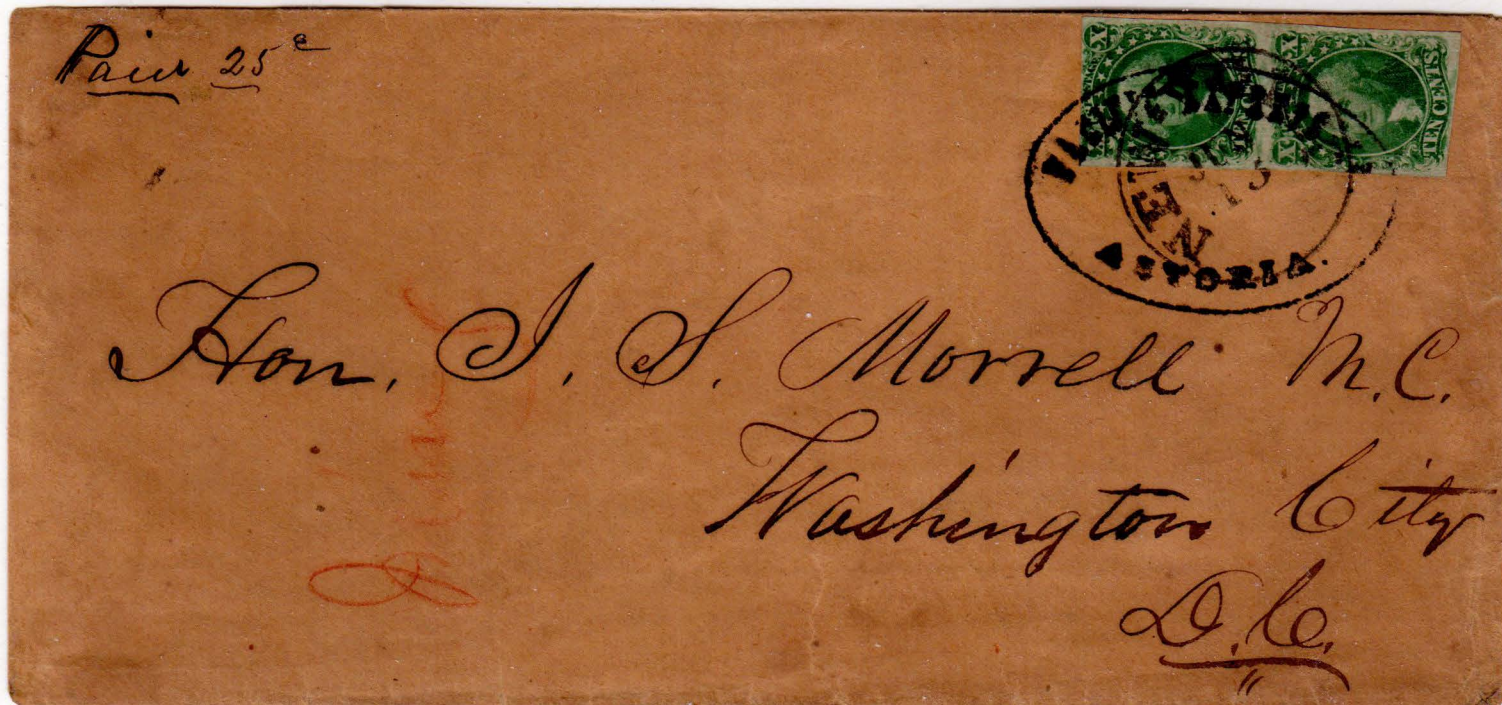


Adams took over Newell's Express in late 1852 and carried steamship mail from San Francisco to Astoria. No Astoria Adams Express markings are recorded. Fewer than 5 examples of Adams' first Portland handstamp are recorded. (illustrated in "Oregon Express Companies")



Stuart's Express Olympia W.T.. Collect 50 - Overland to Portland, Adams & Co. Portland, 23 Oct, steamship via Astoria to San Francisco - Only recorded Stuart - Adams conjunctive use

1855 - Pacific Express



By 1855, expresses were required to pay government postage. Sender bought two stamps for double rate, then paid 25 cent express fee. Sent via Panama and mailed at New York - **Only recorded Pacific Express Astoria handstamp**



San Francisco
18 June 1855,
PACIFIC
EXPRESS
double-circle
datestamp

PMSC steamship
to Astoria,
Mailed on 23 June
to Olympia W.T.

Unclaimed and
returned in mail
via Astoria to
San Francisco

These two covers are conjunctive uses between an express company and the U.S. Mail.

1861 - Pony Express from Missouri, then Ship from San Francisco

In December 1859 the default route for transcontinental mail between the eastern United States and the Oregon Country switched from the via Panama route to overland mail routes. In April 1860, the Central Overland and California Pike's Peak Express Company (COC&PP) started a pony express to prove the feasibility of the central route from St. Joseph Missouri to San Francisco. The COC&PP advertised 10 day cross-country service with relay stations providing fresh horses and riders.



New York overland to St. Joseph Missouri in closed bag with \$2.50 in coin
 Departed St. Joseph on 10 March 1861, reaching San Francisco on 23 March
 Mailed at San Francisco on 25 March for steamship "Pacific" departing 26 March
 Astoria 30 March and Portland 31 March 1861

Only recorded Pony Express envelopes addressed to Oregon
 (illustrated in Frajola, Kramer, Walske census).

Addressee, Joseph Ruckel, was a founder of the Oregon Steam Navigation Company which would soon control Columbia River shipping. Therefore it was entirely appropriate that a Pony Express cover to Ruckel be delivered to Portland by steamship rather than by the stagecoach route from Sacramento. By this date, most California mail came north to Oregon by stagecoach rather than by ship via Astoria.

1858, 1865 - Wells Fargo



Wells Fargo
Portland
(circa 1858)
Ten cent envelope
for transcontinental
postal rate

Steamboat down
Columbia River
to Astoria

PMSC steamship to
San Francisco,
then via Panama
to New York

“C.O.D.” by
Metropolitan
Express for
delivery to NY
street address

Wells Fargo’s Portland and Oregon City offices sent and received early mail by ship via Astoria, but surprisingly an Astoria Wells Fargo office was not opened until late 1865.

Helena
Montana Territory,
Holladay’s Express
15 Dec 1865,
Stagecoach to
Boise City

Wells Fargo
Boise City
23 Dec 1865

Stagecoach to
Wallula W.T.,
Oregon Steam
Navigation Co.
to Astoria,
W.F. 18 Jan 1866,
Earliest “Astoria
Wells Fargo” use

Steamship to SF
23 Jan datestamp



Holladay-Wells Fargo conjunctive use - Steamboat passage down the Columbia now included short portage railroads around rapids at Celilo and Cascades. Stagecoach roads in the 1860s and through railroads in the 1880s would soon make Astoria less important as a transit point for ship mail.