

# 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.

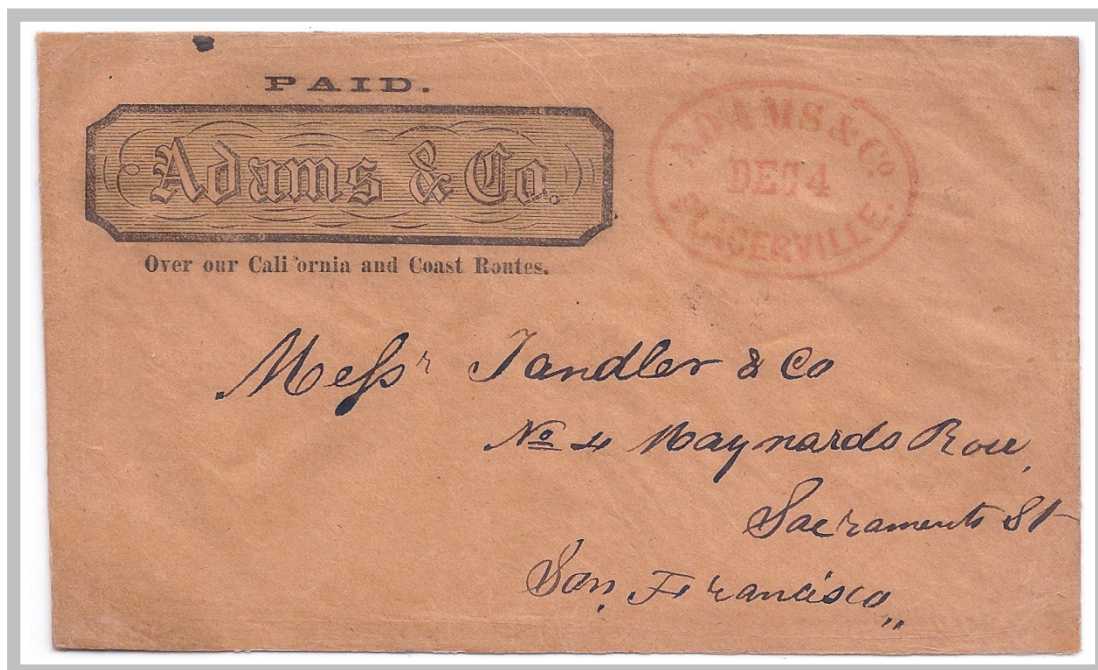
## Western Expresses

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

## 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)



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## Crawford's Middle Fork Express – 1857 to 1859

Ellison Lassel 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.



## Western Expresses

## Francis & Co.'s Express – Nov, 1859 to May, 1862

Robert Francis and James S. Bump formed Francis & Co.'s Express in late 1859. Based out of Gibsonville, they ran to La Porte, Onion Valley, and Nelson's Point. They connected with Whiting & Co. at Quincy; Everts, Wilson & Co. at La Porte; and Wells, Fargo at Marysville. The express operated as Francis' Express after Bump left the partnership. Holland, Morley & Company bought them out in May, 1862.



**PAID Francis & Co.'s Express** printed frank from the mining region of the Gibsonville Ridge on the Feather River to La Porte; by government mail **from La Porte Cal. Sep 5 1860** to Greenfield, Mass.



**PAID Francis & Co.'s Express** red printed frank to La Porte; entered mails **La Porte Cal. Jul 26 (1861)**; inexplicably turned over to **Wells Fargo Jul 27 Marysville** for carriage to Secret Ravine. A nearly identical Everts, Wilson red printed frank cover is known with the same LaPorte (Apr 22) and Wells Fargo Marysville (Apr 24) handstamps.



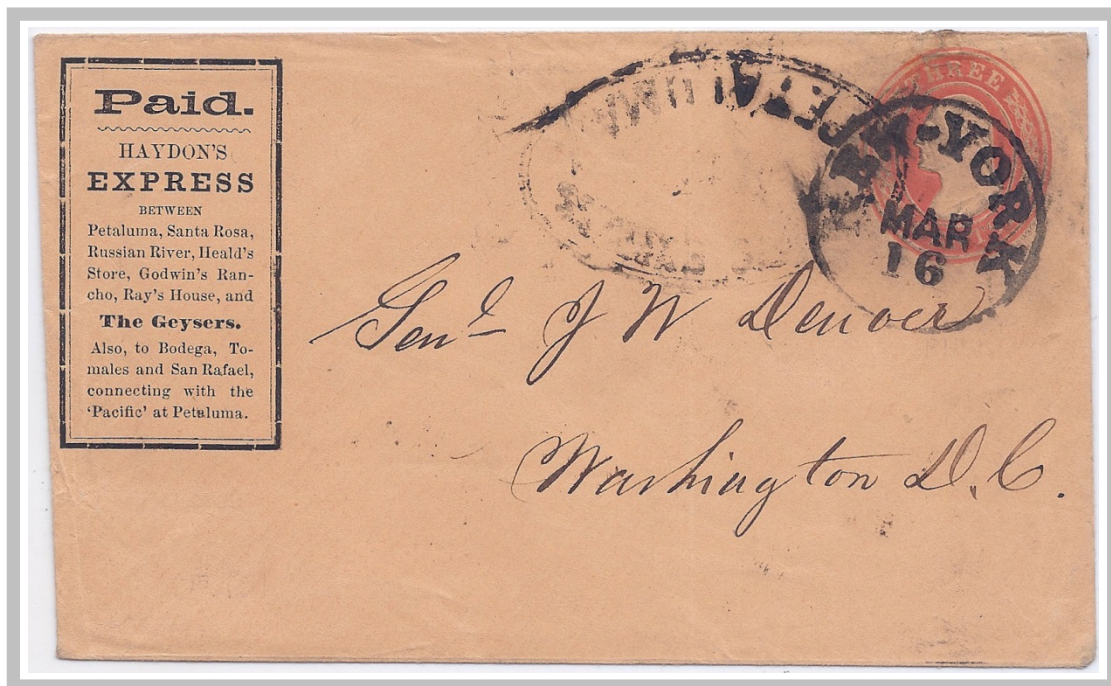
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## Haydon's Express – 1856

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.*



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## 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 29<sup>th</sup>/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.



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## Langton & Brother's Express – Nov, 1853 to Feb, 1855

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 20<sup>th</sup> 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



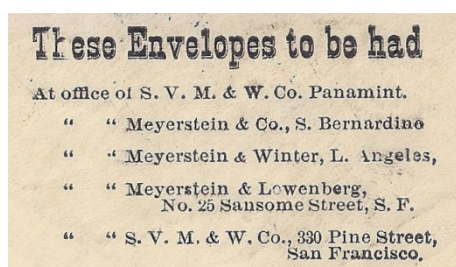
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## Panamint Pony Express – Sep, 1874 to Nov, 1874

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.*



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.



## Western Expresses

## Peterson's Lower California Express – Mar, 1863 to Jul, 1863

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.





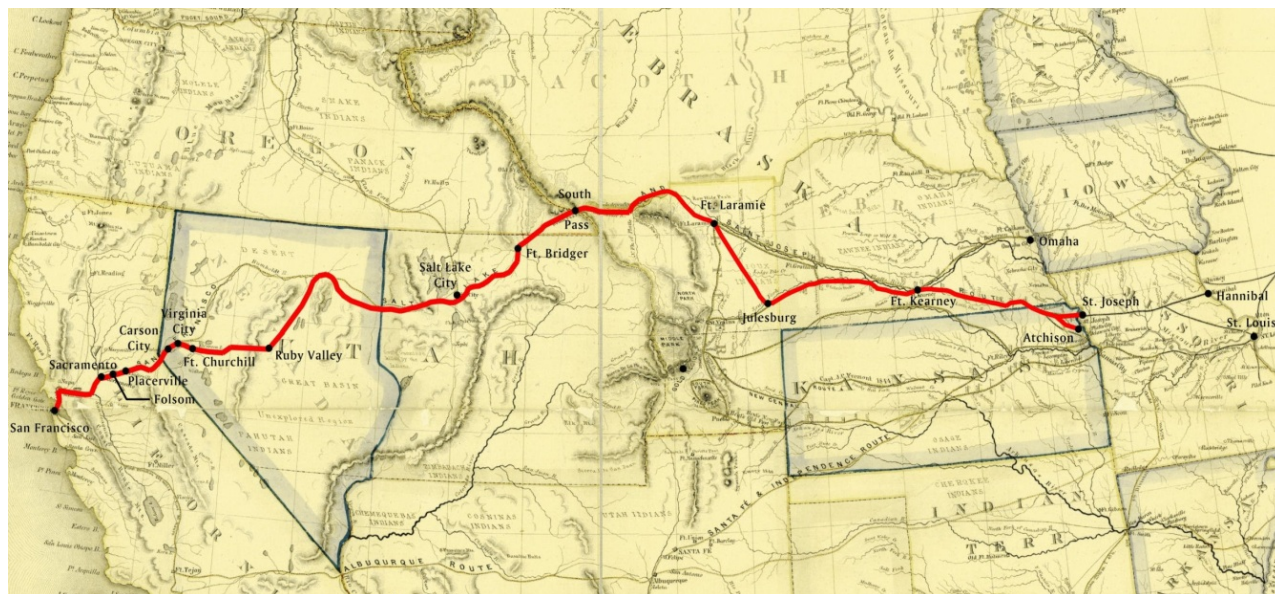
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## Pony Express – Apr 3, 1860 to Oct 26, 1861 Second Rate Period - Eastbound

The transcontinental Pony Express was the result of a vision by William Russell, Alexander Majors, and William Waddell to institute a ten-day private mail service between St. Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento, California. Their goal was to demonstrate a viable Central Route (versus the southern Butterfield route) in order to gain government mail contracts. The Pony Express demonstrated the capability to carry mail via the Central Route; however, it was a business failure with the partners incurring large losses.



By Pony Express, **PAID Central Overland Pony Express Company**. "way" cover (likely picked up at Carson City, the eastern terminus of the telegraph) to St. Joseph, Missouri with **Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company St. Joseph Mo. Sep [2]6**; by US post office **Saint Joseph, Mo. Sep 27, 1860** to Utica, New York. *The Pony Express rate was \$2.50 per quarter ounce from Aug 14, 1860 to Apr 14, 1861. Only seven COPEC printed frank covers are known. (ex-Haas, Walske)*





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 21<sup>st</sup> *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.



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## T.F. Tracy's Express – late 1858 to early 1859

Theodore F. Tracy established a number of express services operating from a base at Placerville, California. These included a service from Placerville to Carson Valley, Nevada and a service with a partner, J. I. Spear, Jr., that ran from Placerville to Georgetown, California. Tracy's Carson Valley Express connected with Wells Fargo at Placerville.



By **T. F. Tracy's Express Paid** from Indian Diggings to Diamond Springs with political letter datelined *Indian Diggings May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1859* enclosed. *One of only two known examples from this express.*





Granville Zachariah ran his snow-shoe express over the Gibsonville Ridge between the towns of Downieville and LaPorte.



Into the mails with **Downie-Ville Cal Jun 12 '65** (Monday) postmark; picked up by **Zack's Snow-Shoe Express. PAID.** in his printed frank envelope and carried ~20 miles northwest over the Gibsonville Ridge on Tuesday (Jun 13, 1865) from Downieville to Howland Flat and LaPorte.

**ZACHARIAH'S EXPRESS.**—We call public attention to the fact that a snow-shoe express has been started between this place and La Porte. It becomes those interested in speedy communication between the different portions of the county that they give the new enterprise a liberal support. Our correspondents on the North side will note the time of leaving La Porte. If sent by mail to La Porte, letters should be directed in care of B. Zachariah, who will call for them on the days noted in the advertisement for leaving that place.

The Messenger will for a week or two—or until other arrangements, now in contemplation, can be made—be sent to our subscribers over North on the mule train by way of Howland Flat, instead of by Zack's express, as formerly. In the mean time we shall have to suspend our papers to Morris-town till the contemplated change is made.

## Snow-Shoe Express.

**GRANVILLE ZACHARIAH,**

Will commence running twice a week between Downieville and La Porte, and intermediate points, carrying

**Letters, Papers, Langton's Expr's  
AND THE  
Mountain Messenger,**

Leaving Downieville on Tuesdays and Saturdays, and LaPorte on Sundays and Wednesdays.

It is to be hoped that citizens along the route will patronize this enterprise liberally, that it may become a permanent winter communication between the North and South sides of the County, saving the long delays attendant upon letter communication via Marysville.

First announcement (upper left) and ad (right) for Zack's Snow-Shoe Express in the Downieville *Mountain Messenger* on Dec 31, 1864. The ad ran through Aug 19, 1865, at which time the announcement at lower left was printed, indicating the end of Zack's service.