

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.

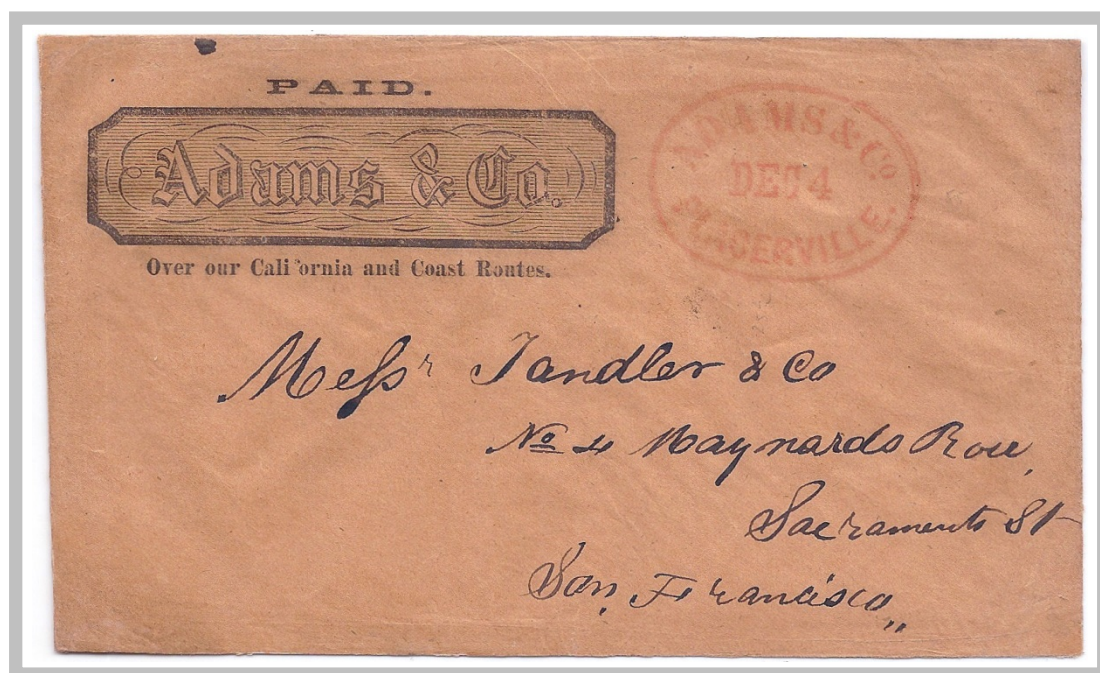
Western Expresses

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.*

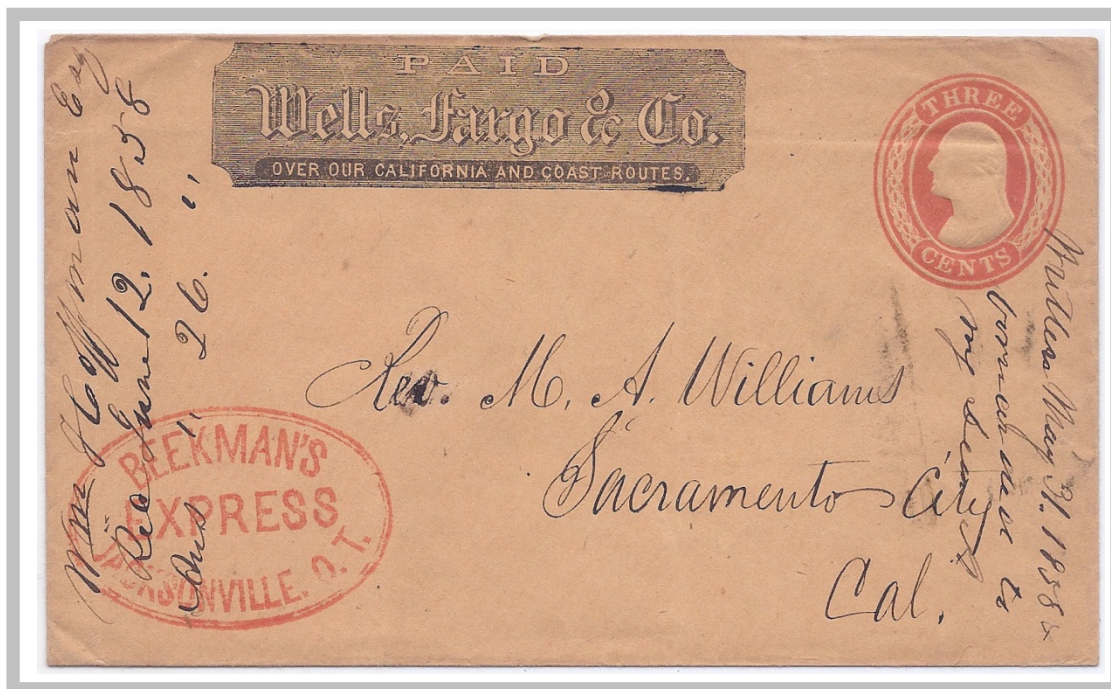


PAID Adams & Co., Over our California and Coast Routes with Adams & Co. Placerville Dec 4 (1854) hand stamp to San Francisco.

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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.
 August C. C. BEEKMAN.



Above: Cornelius Beekman, from the Wells Fargo Archives.

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

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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.

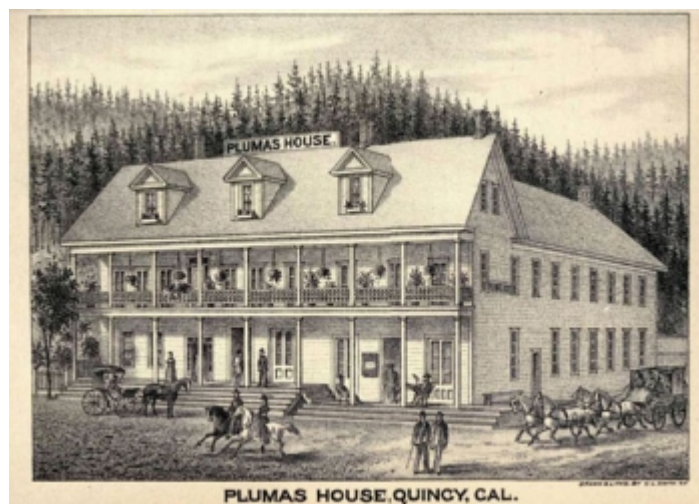
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Garland's Express – 1854 to 1872

Richard E. Garland started his express in 1854, perhaps with a partner named Dean, to serve mining camps between Oroville and Quincy, California. His routes were expanded in 1864 to include service to Taylorsville and Crescent Mills. In the same year, he purchased J.P. Wharton's Express serving La Porte and Gibsonville. One reference indicates he bought out Whiting's Express in 1868. Garland sold out to Wells Fargo in 1872.



By **Garland's Express PAID** in their franked envelope to Quincy, Long Valley, Beckwourth Road. Pencil notation on verso *Letter enclosed dated March 25, 1865* (letter no longer present). Beckwourth Road went through Beckwourth Pass, the lowest summit of the High Sierras, making it a favorite route of wagon trains and expressmen. *The only reported used example from this express company.*



Gilbert & Hedges Express operated along the west coast of California from San Francisco south to San Diego, connecting with G. H. Wines and Co. in San Francisco. The Oct 20, 1855 issue of the *Los Angeles Star* announces their formation. The latest advertisement located for Gilbert & Hedges is dated Jan 26, 1856.



By **Gilbert & Hedges Express San Diego** to San Francisco; exchanged with G. H. Wines & Co. with their **Collect** fancy handstamp for delivery within San Francisco to "Front St". *One of only four known covers from this express and the only one from San Diego.*

NEW EXPRESS Co.—Messrs. Gilbert & Hedges have formed a copartnership to conduct a general Express business. This Company will connect at San Francisco with G. H. Wines & Co's. Express. Mr. Gilbert is well known on the Southern coast, as a prompt and vigilant messenger, and any business entrusted to his care, will be attended to with promptness and dispatch.

The *Los Angeles Star* issue dated Oct 20, 1855 contained both an announcement for the formation of Gilbert & Hedges Express and an advertisement noting their connection with G. H. Wines & Co.

GILBERT & HEDGES.
Southern Coast Express
 CONNECTION WITH
G. H. WINES & CO'S
California, Oregon, Atlantic and
European Express.

HAVING formed a connection with the above named house, we offer facilities to the Public unsurpassed by any Company in California. LETTERS, PACKAGES and TREASURE received, forwarded and insured at all of our offices on the Southern Coast, up to the latest moment, for all parts of California, Oregon, the Atlantic States and Europe.

Particular attention will be paid to the purchase of merchandise, and promptly forwarded to destination. Bills of Exchange procured on the most reasonable terms. Every thing pertaining to an Express and Forwarding business, attended to with promptness and dispatch.

We are determined not to be excelled by any Company in California.

H. READ.....	Agent Los Angeles
MESSRS. FRANKLIN & CO.....	San Diego
PUIG & BROTHER.....	Santa Barbara
TURTIS & CONOVER.....	Monterey

Office in San Francisco at G. H. Wines & Co., No 118 Sacramento Street, next to the Pacific Mail Co's office.
 October 20, 1855.

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Harrison's Susanville & Goose Lake Express – 1872

Harrison operated his California express in Siskiyou County between Susanville and Goose Lake in 1872.



By **Harrison's Susanville & Goose Lake Express Company PAID** likely from the Goose Lake area to Adinville; by post office from *Adinville Sept 1872* to Marysville. Adinville (Adin) was on the route between Goose Lake and Susanville. *The only reported example from this express.*



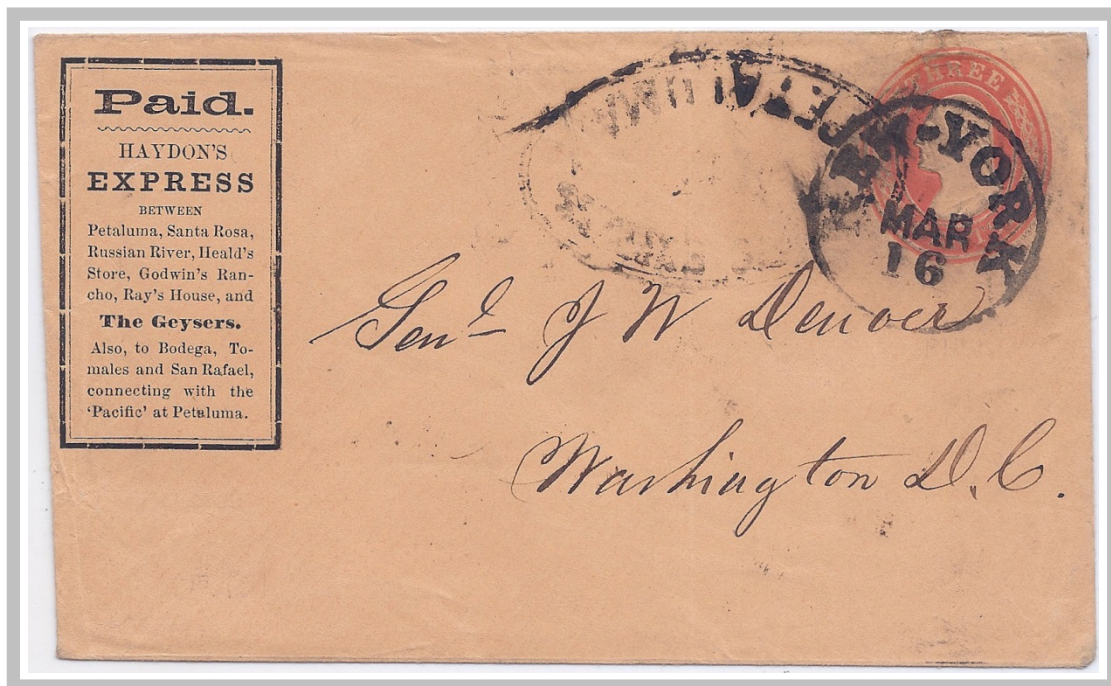
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Haydon's Express – 1856

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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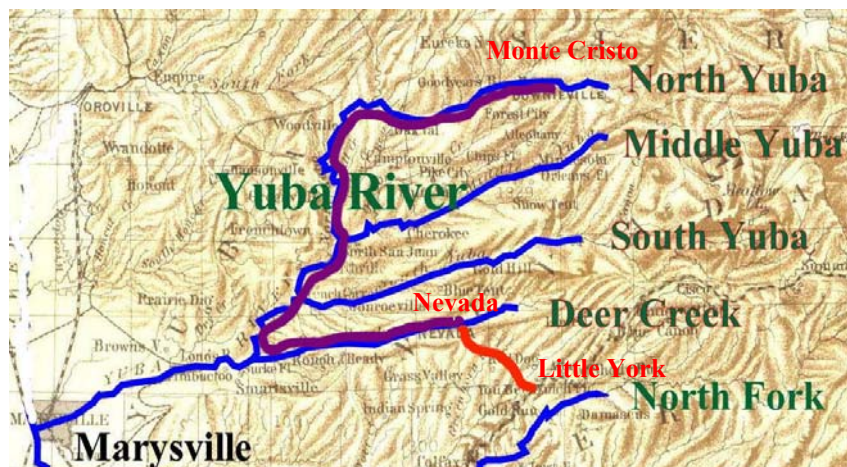
Hervey's Express – 1858 to 1860

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 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

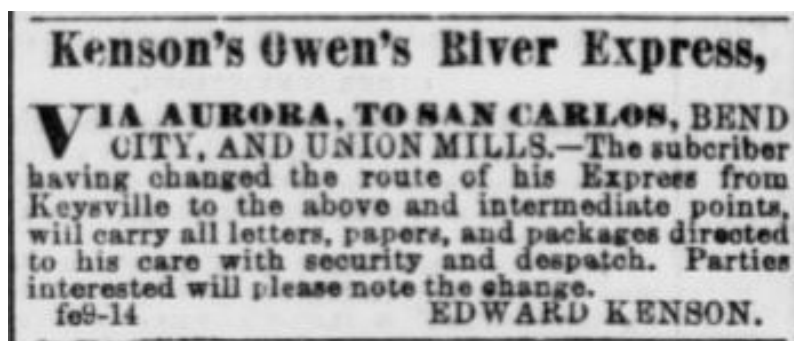


Monte Cristo was WNW of Downieville on the North Fork of the Yuba River. Little York was a mining camp between You Bet and Dutch Flat near the North Fork of the American River.

Edward Kenson operated a pony express service on the eastern side of the Sierras from Camp Independence, California. His summer route was north to Aurora, Nevada; in the winter south over Walker Pass to Keysville. Kenson connected with Wells Fargo at Aurora, or would deposit the express in the US Mails.



By Kenson's Owens River Express **San Carlos Inyo Dist.** from San Carlos to Esmeralda, N.T.; by post office **Esmeralda, N.T. Oct 31 1863** to San Francisco. San Carlos post office opened Jun 1, 1864.

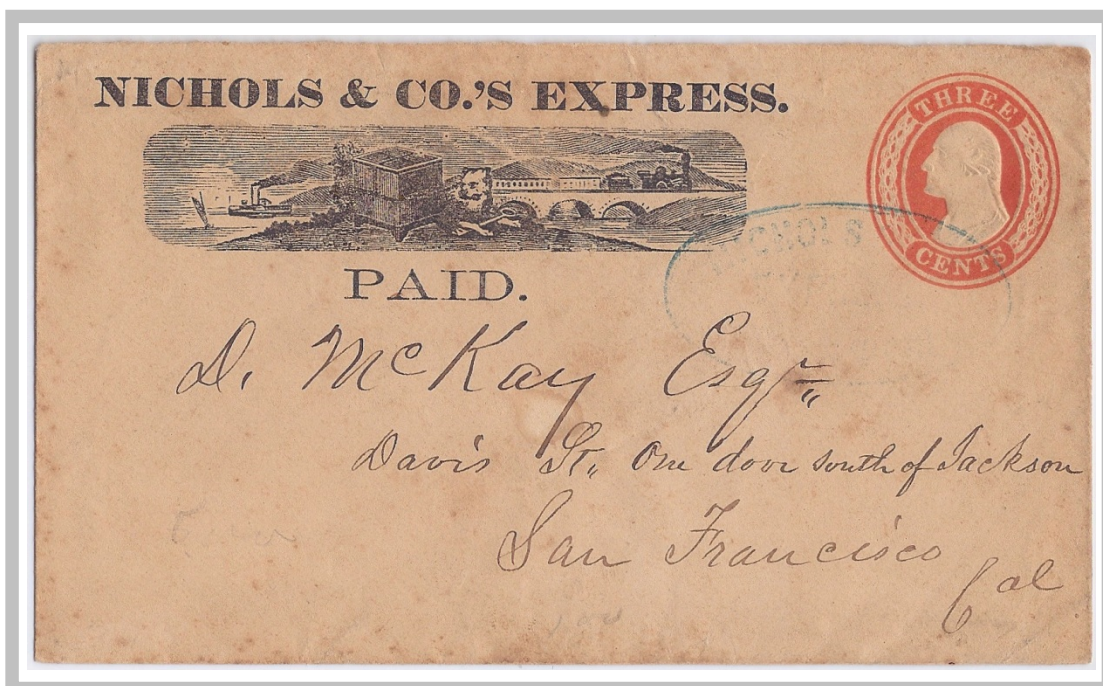


San Francisco *Daily Alta California* advertisement from Feb 9, 1864 noting Kenson's Owens River Express route change from Keysville to San Carlos via Aurora.

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Nichols & Co.'s Express – Oct, 1857 to Jul, 1858

This express, which first advertised in October 1857, operated from San Francisco by steamer via Crescent City, to Oregon and the Frazer River mines and to Bellingham Bay, Washington. They connected with Freeman & Co's Express and Alta Express. In July 1858, they sold out to American Express (the California company) who adopted the same printed frank.



Nichols & Co.'s Express PAID printed frank with **Nichols & Co.'s Express Northern Coast** handstamp into San Francisco from the northern mines. The Nichols San Francisco handstamp is 26x35mm; whereas the Northern Coast example is 24x34mm, like this one.



By **Nichols & Co.'s Express. PAID.** handstamp frank with **Nichols & Co.'s Express San Francisco** for local delivery. *The only known example of this black frank.*

Organ & Tibbett's express ran from Meadow Lake to the Excelsior District of California from 1865 to 1868, per Nathan's book.



By **Organ & Tibbits Excelsior Express. PAID.** to Dutch Flat, California. *One of only four examples from this express, and one of only two of this type.*



By **Organ & Tibbits Excelsior Express. PAID.** to Dutch Flat; exchanged with **Wells Fargo & Co. Nov 4 Dutch Flat** to Nevada City. Docketing at left Nov 4, 1868. *One of only four examples from this express, and one of only two of this type.*

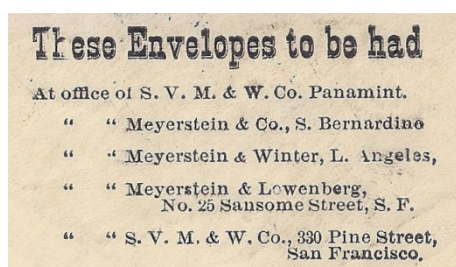
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Panamint Pony Express – Sep, 1874 to Nov, 1874

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.

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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Swart & Co's Express – May, 1854 to Dec, 1854

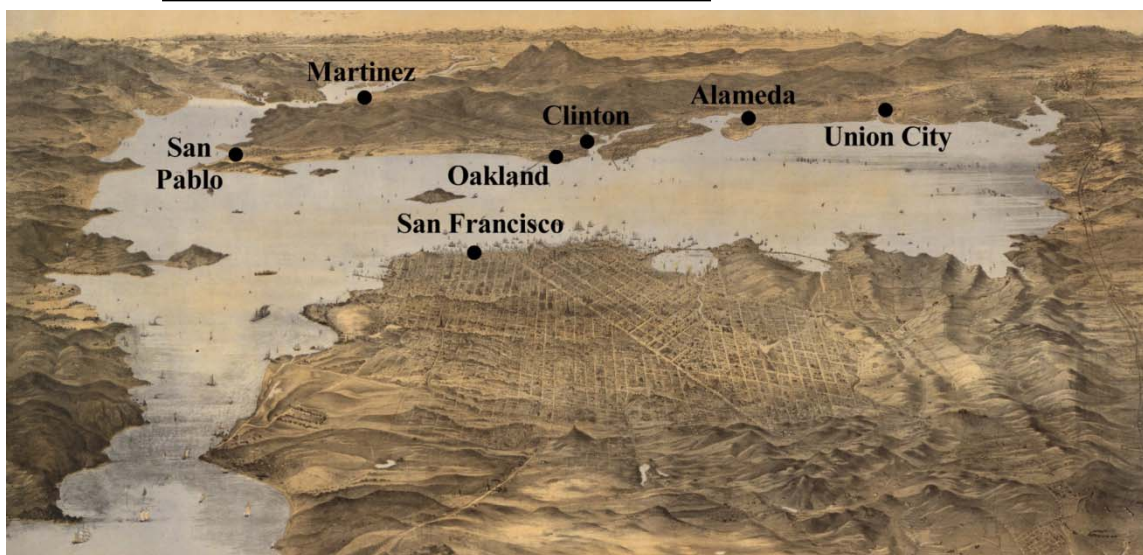
Jesse H. Swart purchased Almy's Oakland and San Francisco Express in May, 1854. Their daily route was by steamer from San Francisco to Oakland, Clinton, Alameda, Union City, San Pablo and Martinez. Swart sold out to Swift & Company in Dec, 1854.



By **Swart & Cos. Express Oakland** from *Union City* Nov 22nd 1854 to San Francisco. Docketing indicates mailing and receipt on the same day.



Aug 3, 1854 *Daily Placer Times and Transcript*



Bird's eye view showing location of Swart & Co.'s offices in San Francisco Bay

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