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Special issue for New York 2016

The route across Nicaragua 1849-1868 and plans for a Nicaragua canal 1886-1902

Private markings directed mail via Nicaragua

Michael Schreiber

This issue of *Nicarao* presents a compendium of facts about the establishment of a transit route across Nicaragua beginning in 1849 and about the later failed Nicaragua canal.

The river, lake, and land route carried gold seekers and goods westward. It took the disillusioned and gold eastward. It carried non-contract mail in both directions.

Page 5 through Page 30 picture dozens of covers that transited Nicaragua and a few that travelled via Panama. Pages 31 through 46 discuss and list the markings that appear on the Nicaragua covers. Most of

the images of covers are courtesy of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries of New York City, Spink USA of New York City, and Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions of San Francisco.¹

Most names, dates, and events are based on three books: *The First Tycoon: The Epic Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt*, by T.J. Stiles (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2009); *Under the Big Stick: Nicaragua and the United States Since 1848*, by Karl Bermann (Boston, South End Press, 1986); and *Mails of the Westward Expansion, 1801 to 1861*, by Steven C. Walske and Richard C. Frajola (Western Cover Society, 2015).



Mail from California to the East sent during 1853-1856 on the Via Nicaragua non-contract route usually bears an endorsement or a marking for the route. The mail usually entered the U.S. mails at New York City. This cover arrived at New York by ship on October 27, 1853, and was sent onward the same day.

This article includes five major revisions as of May 2016. Each is identified by an italic note. See also new pages 49-50.

Spain and Great Britain in Nicaragua

1522

An expedition of Spaniard Gil González Dávila from Panama City arrives near the large lake, and Dávila meets Nicarao, one of the Indian chiefs.

1524

Francisco Hernández de Córdoba founds Spanish settlements at Granada and Leon Viejo (today an archaeological site near Momotombo).

1539

The Calero-Machuca expedition travels from Granada via the Rio San Juan to San Juan de Nicaragua (the original Spanish name for San Juan del Norte).

1633

British traders from Providence Island form a liaison with Indians at Cape Gracias a Dios, and settlers eventually move to the Cape and to the pirate haven further south at the mouth of the Rio Escondito (Bluefields).

1645

British and Indians ascend the Río Escondido and cross land to attack Matagalpa and the Spaniards.

1687

British settlers crown the first Mosquito king in a ceremony in Jamaica.

1699

From Bermuda, William Pitt founds the Black River settlement, located 15 miles upriver from the Honduran Mosquito Coast.

1779 - 1783

Spain declares war on Britain in 1779. Battles are fought at Fort Omoa, Fort Inmaculada, and Black River. The 1783 Treaty of Paris confirms Spain's sovereignty over Belize, but language on settlements is ambiguous, so Britain moves to refortify its settlements.

1786

By the Convention of London, signed July 14, Britain agrees to abandon the Mosquito shore but acquires rights in Belize, where the Mosquito shore settlers are to be resettled. In 1786 and 1787, approximately 2,650 people located at settlements from Black River to Bluefields are resettled to Belize with logging rights. Some people go to other locations.

1800

September 4. Miskito Indians attack the Spanish at Black River and annihilate them.

1816

The British take George Frederick from Jamaica to Belize to be crowned king of Mosquitia and to reside at Cape Gracias a Dios.

THE NICARAGUA STUDY GROUP

We promote the collection and study of the postage and revenue stamps of Nicaragua and their usage.

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1819

Spain cedes Florida to the United States.

Independence from Spain

1821 - 1824

In 1821, Mexico becomes independent. On September 15, 1821, the provinces of the captaincy-general of Guatemala declare independence. In January 1822, the provinces of Central America, including Nicaragua, are incorporated into Mexico.

In 1823 in July, the Provincias Unidas del Centro de América is formed, with its capital at Guatemala City. The United States begins to recognize the Central American states. President James Monroe includes statements in his December 2 message to Congress that eventually evolve into the Monroe Doctrine. Also in 1823, Jose Manuel de la Cerda raises the idea of a trans-Nicaragua canal. British recolonization begins with the scheme of Gregor MacGregor in Honduras at the coastal lagoon near Black River, but the colony fails. In 1824, the new constitution calls the federation the República Federal de Centroamérica. Britain recognizes most of the Central American republics.

1826 - 1838

Period of liberal and conservative fighting, chaos, civil war. The federation capital is at San Salvador. In 1834, Frederick Chatfield is sent as British consul to the federation. In 1837-38, under superintendent Alexander MacDonald, the British expand south from Belize to the Mosquito Shore and seize Roatán. In 1838, **Nicaragua** secedes from the federation.

1836

The Republic of Texas declares independence from Mexico on March 2.

The British and San Juan del Norte

1840 - 1841

In 1840, Nicaragua sends a commandant to San Juan del Norte to exert Nicaraguan territorial rights. In 1841, British superintendent Alexander MacDonald (with King Robert Charles Frederick) demands that Nicaragua recognize the king's jurisdiction over San Juan del Norte. MacDonald hijacks the commandant.

1842

Early in the year, the union of Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador is revived. The British blockade the Atlantic ports, including San Juan del Norte.

1843

Nicaragua formally accepts the British protectorate.

1844

The British again blockade San Juan del Norte. The commissioners for a Prussian colonization plan at Bluefields and Patrick Walker as resident British representative arrive at Bluefields in July 1844. The colonists reach Bluefields on September 27, 1846, and survive, but they begin to disperse in 1849.

1845

On March 1, U.S. President John Tyler signs a bill to annex the Republic of Texas as of December 29. On March 4, James K. Polk is inaugurated as U.S. president. Texas transfers formal authority to the United States on February 19, 1846.

1846

The Oregon Treaty is signed June 15, 1846, settling the boundary dispute between the United States and the United Kingdom. New Granada agrees to free and safe passage for Americans across Panama.

U.S. mail contracts

1847

By act of Congress of March 3, the U.S. government announces that the postmaster general will award subsidized 10-year contracts for transporting mail from New York to Chagres (Panama) and from Panama City to Astoria (Oregon), where in 1811 John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company had built Fort Astoria, renamed Fort George in 1813 by the British.

On April 20, the U.S. Congress through the secretary of the navy awards a subsidized mail contract for the Atlantic route to Chagres. The buyer is Albert G. Sloo, a dummy agent for financier **George Law**. On August 17, the subsidized mail contract of Sloo for an Atlantic line to Chagres is assigned as a trusteeship to George Law and his group of investors.

In September, John Shively arrives at Astoria as the newly appointed U.S. postmaster. He serves until 1849, when he joins the gold rush in California. On his 1847 trip overland to Astoria, he carries the first U.S. contract mail across the Rocky Mountains.

The Pacific route is awarded November 16. The buyer is Arnold Harris, a dummy agent for **William Henry Aspinwall**. On November 19, the subsidized mail contract of Harris for a Pacific line from Panama to Astoria is sold to Aspinwall and his group.

Steamship companies

1848

In January, British representative Patrick Walker arrives at San Juan del Norte from Bluefields with the Mosquito king and a militia and occupies the town with the help of a British warship. British officials are installed, and the town is renamed **Greytown** after Sir Charles Grey, the governor of Jamaica.

On January 24, gold is discovered along the American River at Coloma near the Sutter's sawmill site in Alta California. The news spreads along the Pacific Coast to Oregon and Latin America and to Hawaii. By summer, the news reaches New York City, but many in the East do not believe it.

On February 2, the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo formally redraws the border of Mexico and thereby cedes to the United States Alta California and other land that would become the territories of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Nevada, and parts of Wyoming and Colorado.

On August 14, the U.S. Congress establishes the Territory of Oregon.

On April 12, **William Henry Aspinwall**, G.S. Howland, S.S. Howland and others form the **Pacific Mail Steamship Company**. Its first steamship *California* departs New York City October 6, 1848, arriving at Callao December 27, Panama January 17, 1849, and San Francisco February 28. The company

establishes regular sailings from San Francisco beginning April 12, 1849.² Other vessels operate between the San Francisco terminus and Astoria.

In 1848, **George Law**, Marshall O. Roberts, and Bowes R. McIlvaine form the **U.S. Mail Steamship Company**. Its first steamship *Falcon* departs New York December 1, 1848, for Chagres, arriving December 27. Its second steamship *Isthmus* departs New York December 26 and arrives at Chagres January 16, 1849. New steamships *Ohio* and *Georgia* begin service in September 1849 and February 1850, respectively.

Service from June 1849 through December 1851 also includes a secondary route to and from New Orleans. Early sailings from New York also include stops at Havana. Regular sailings twice a month begin in January 1850, including some by non-contract steamships.³

As of January 1, 1849, the postal system of New Granada is responsible for carrying mail across the isthmus and uses local contractors. Beginning in November 1849, mail agents accompany the contract mails.

On December 5, 1848, in his fourth State of the Union address, U.S. President James K. Polk confirms the discovery of gold in California, based on reports to the government from Army and Navy officers. The speech sets off the gold rush of 1849.

Ship canal company formed

1849

On February 28, 1849, William Van Voorhies arrives on the *California* at San Francisco as U.S. special post office agent for California and Oregon. Using the chartered bark *Callao*, Van Voorhies on March 19, 1849, sends the first contract mail from San Francisco. New agent R.T.P. Allen arrives June 13.⁴

The brig *Mary* of **Gordon's Passenger Line** departs New York City on February 20, 1849, for San Juan del Norte (Greytown), arriving March 12. The passengers for California travel the Rio San Juan and Lake Nicaragua to Granada, arriving April 13 and eventually reach Realejo, the old colonial-era port near Corinto Bay. They depart from Realejo for San Francisco in June, July (on the *Laura Ann* July 20), and later, with the last of them arriving October 4.

Other companies also use Realejo as a port: Howard and Son, Law and Company, and William A. White Company. Corinto does not become a viable commercial port until 1875, when the first commercial dock is built. **Map 1** shows the route.⁵

In spring 1849, **Cornelius Vanderbilt** organizes



Map 1. The red line traces the route across Lake Nicaragua taken by fortune hunters traveling to California in the period from February 1849 through June 1851. After ascending the Rio San Juan in river steamers and transiting to Granada in large canoes (bongos), travelers went by land to the village of Realejo, the old colonial port located near an outlet to the Bay of Corinto. The island of Corinto was not developed as a port of entry until 1859-1863.

the **American Atlantic and Pacific Ship Canal Company**. He engages **Joseph L. White** to lobby John M. Clayton, the new secretary of state in the Taylor administration, and he sends **David L. White** to Nicaragua to secure for him a pact for a canal across Nicaragua.

In June 1849, **Elijah Hise**, a Polk administration chargé d'affaires, and the Nicaraguan chargé d'affaires sign a treaty ceding exclusive rights to the United States or to a company (Compañía de Tránsito de Nicaragua, headed by American **David J. Brown**) to construct a canal, a railroad, and transit roads across the isthmus, plus access to public lands, the right to fortify, and the free passage of people and goods without duties or restrictions. The United States does not ratify the Hise treaty.

In August 1849, working with Vanderbilt agent David L. White, **Ephraim George Squier**, special chargé d'affaires to Central America for the Taylor administration, signs an alternate treaty with Nicaragua on behalf of Vanderbilt. The United States does not ratify the Squier treaty.

On August 26, 1849, David L. White, representing the **American Atlantic and Pacific Ship Canal Company** (the company of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Daniel B. Allen, Joseph L. White and others), signs a contract for a canal and a rail line or carriage road with the unity government of Nicaragua. Nicaragua ratifies both the Squier treaty and the Vanderbilt contract on September 20, 1849. The Vanderbilt firm eventually absorbs the firm of David J. Brown.

Beginning in late 1849, private companies⁶ establish ocean-to-ocean express service for shipping gold and transporting mail between California and New York City via Panama or Nicaragua on any ship: Adams & Co.'s Express (November 1849 - February 1855), Berford and Co.'s Letter & Package Express (fall 1849 - February 1855), Palmer and Co.'s Express (March 1850 - December 1851), Gregory's Atlantic & Pacific Express (April 1850 - November 1852), Dodge & Co.'s Express (October 1850 - August 1851), Pacific Express March 1855 - April 1857), Wells, Fargo & Co.'s Express (from July 1852), Vanderbilt's Independent Line (August 1853 - September 1854), J. Hawes and Co.'s San Francisco & New York Express (December 1854 - September 1855) and G.H. Wines & Co.'s Express (1855 - mid 1857). G.H. Wines also operated in Nicaragua.

Thompson & Hitchcock in New York City acts as forwarder for Gregory's Atlantic & Pacific Express.

Figure 1 and **Figure 2** picture folded letters handled by Gregory's in 1851. **Figure 4** and possibly **Figure 5** picture letters handled by Gregory's in 1852. **Figure 3** pictures a folded letter carried privately in



Figure 1. Folded letter dated May 12, 1851, paid from San Francisco, forwarded by Gregory's Atlantic and Pacific Express, General Office, 280 Montgomery Street, by Pacific Mail Steamship Co. to Panama City and from Chagres by U.S. Mail Steamship Co. to New York City to forwarder Thompson & Hitchcock, 128 Pearl Street. Regular sailings on the Nicaragua route did not begin until July 14 from both San Francisco and New York City.

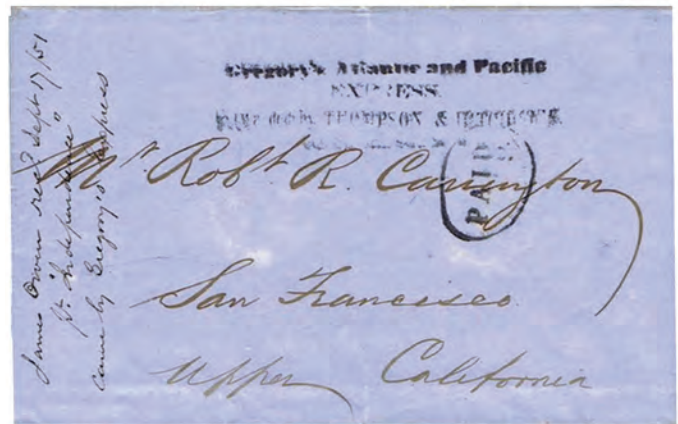


Figure 2. Folded letter dated August 14, 1851, paid from New York City, forwarded by Thompson & Hitchcock for Gregory's Atlantic and Pacific Express to Vanderbilt steamship *Prometheus* to Greytown and from San Juan del Sur by Vanderbilt steamship *Independence* to San Francisco and to Gregory's office there. Both this cover and the **Figure 1** cover were carried entirely outside the U.S. mails. 1851 from Nicaragua to San Francisco.

Also beginning in 1849, private businesses in San Francisco offer letter bags for the deposit of mail via the post office, a steamship agent or a non-contract steamship: Merchants' Exchange and News Room (November 1849), Noisy Carrier's Publishing Hall or Noisy Carrier's Mail (1853-1856), Still & Conner's Bookstore (July 1850) and later John N. Still's, George H. Leland & John W. Sullivan (May 1852 and separately by mid 1853), and Lecount & Strong (June 1853).

Forwarders in Central America also service the Nicaragua route: G. Mayorga y Ca in San Juan del Norte (1853) and Santiago Mercano in Granada.

On December 13, 1849, Vanderbilt departs for San Juan del Norte (via Chagres) on the *Crescent City*

(owned by **Charles Morgan**, who rides with Vanderbilt), but the journey is abandoned after the engine support breaks and the ship drifts. A brig rescues them.

U.S. military conflicts begin in the West with the Arikara (1823) and end with the Utes and Paiutes (1923). Much fighting occurs during 1836-1891.



Figure 3. Folded Letter written at Realejo [Nicaragua] May 29, 1851, and carried privately from Nicaragua, apparently on a ship calling at the old port of El Realejo (near Chinandega). Deposited at the San Francisco post office and rated 1-cent postage due as a drop letter.

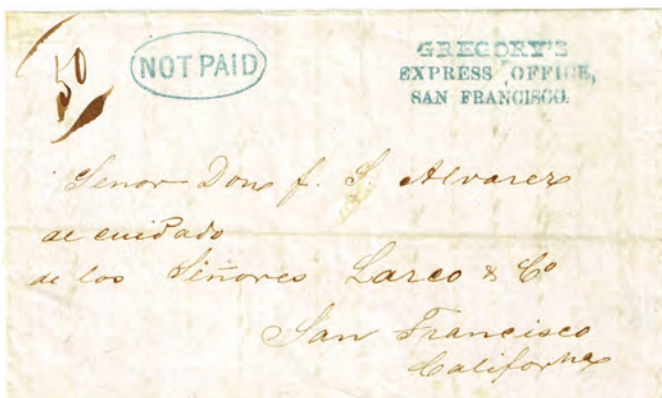
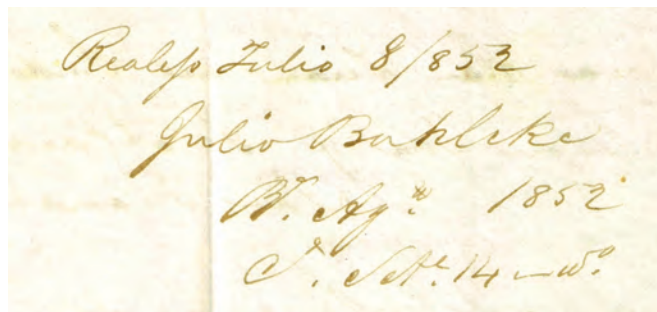


Figure 4. Letter docketed Realejo [Nicaragua] July 8, 1852, carried out of the mails to San Francisco, rated 50 cents due to Gregory's Express, probably double express rate of 25 cents for carriage by coastal vessel.

Accessory Transit Company

1850 - 1851

On March 9, 1850, the **American Atlantic and Pacific Ship Canal Company** is incorporated in Nicaragua. The company eventually acquires a separate charter for a new company to operate a transit route across the isthmus separate from a canal, but Vanderbilt does not wait for this formality.

On April 19, 1850, the United States and the United Kingdom sign the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty. Ratifications are exchanged on July 5. The treaty includes aspects of the unratified Hise and Squier agreements. Neither the United States nor the United Kingdom will attempt to control an interoceanic route, and there will be no fortifications, no colonization, no territorial dominion, no alliances with states or people to secure rights or advantages. And Greytown is to be a free port functioning independently of the Mosquito Reserve protectorate.

In May 1850 on marshy Manzanillo Island, the Panama Canal Company begins building a harbor, docks and a town of elevated buildings for the companies that will construct the Panama Railroad. The town is named Aspinwall, after William Henry Aspinwall, president of the Panama Railroad Company. In mid-March 1852, the eastern port on the isthmus moves from Chagres to Aspinwall, and daily trains operate on a completed section of the railroad.

In an arrangement with the San Francisco postmaster, the Law Line carries mail from San Francisco to Panama departing monthly May 15, 1850, to October 19, 1850 (not in August), until the postmaster general stops the service.

Howard and Son's Empire Line also competes via

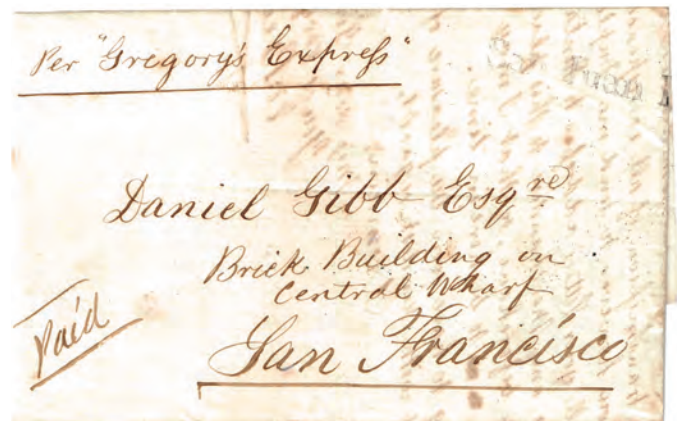


Figure 5. Folded letter datelined San Juan del Sur May 8, 1852, and endorsed "Paid" and "Per Gregory's Express" to San Francisco "Central Wharf." A "San Juan" marking is struck over the right edge.

Panama on the Atlantic (1849) on the Pacific (1850).

On July 1, 1850, Waldo, Hall and Company begin operating a four-year monthly U.S. contract mail route between Santa Fe and Independence, Missouri.

In July 1850, Vanderbilt sends the newly built river steamer *Director* to Lake Nicaragua to carry travelers, even though his route is not yet open.

On August 1, 1850, James Brown (until his death in December 1850) and Samuel Woodson (later also Feramor Little) begin a contract carrying the U.S. mails monthly between Independence, Missouri, and Salt Lake City. Winter snows force mail to be held for months. The contract expires June 30, 1854.

J.L. Brown and L.G. Torrence are awarded a contract to deliver the U.S. mails twice a month between Salt Lake City and The Dalles, effective July 1, 1851. The contract expires June 30, 1854.

A route via Tehuantepec opens on December 10, 1850, organized by Peter Hargous and the New Orleans Company. From New Orleans the *Alabama* steams for Vera Cruz, arriving December 16. It then plies the coast and steams upriver to Minatitlán and to Suchil. From there, passengers travel by land to Tehuantepec and to the port of Ventosa and eventually to California. On May 21, 1851, Mexico revokes the concession.

The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty recognizes the concession for an interoceanic canal obtained in September 1849 by Ephraim G. Squier on behalf of Vanderbilt, Joseph L. White and others. As part of the concession, in 1850-1851, **Orville W. Childs** surveys the route. He determines that the lowest divide in the ranges and cordilleras of the Americas is in Nicaragua, at 153 feet above sea level.

To see the transit route himself, on December 26, 1850, **Vanderbilt** voyages on the new *Prometheus* to San Juan del Norte. From there, he takes the recently purchased river steamer *Orus* (brought from Panama) up the Rio San Juan and across Lake Nicaragua to Granada (where his party rests) and to La Virgen near Rivas. Then he travels by land to San Juan del Sur. *Prometheus* returns from Greytown with Vanderbilt, arriving at New York City February 22, 1851.

The *Orus* soon is lost on the rocks at the Machuca rapids on the Rio San Juan, and Vanderbilt replaces it with the *J.M. Clayton* and the *Sir H.L. Bulwer*.

Vanderbilt fails to acquire a U.S. mail contract. The non-subsidized Vanderbilt line is advertised in New York City as the **Independent Line**. Prior to the opening of the Nicaragua route, Vanderbilt's Independent Line carries passengers to Panama on *Prometheus*.



Figure 6. Folded printed circular to Boston dated "San Francisco, May 31st, 1853" and endorsed and marked for transport via Nicaragua. Rемаiled at New York City where 1¢ stamp was canceled with a seven-bar grid. Carried from San Francisco probably June 1 by the Accessory Transit Company steamship *Brother Jonathan*.



Figure 7. Folded printed circular to Philadelphia dated "San Francisco, May 31st, 1853" and endorsed and marked for transport via Nicaragua. Rемаiled at New York City where bisected 3¢ stamp (overpayment) was canceled with grid. From San Francisco probably June 1 by the Accessory Transit steamship *Brother Jonathan*.



Figure 8. Cover 1853 to Bangor, Maine, partly prepaid 3¢ and endorsed and marked for transit via Nicaragua. Carried from San Francisco June 1 to San Juan del Sur on *Brother Jonathan* and from Greytown June 16 to New York City on *Northern Light*, arriving there June 24 and sent onward the same day.



Map 2. The red line traces the route across Nicaragua for travelers, gold shipments, and non-contract mail using Accessory Transit Company steamships between New York City and California July 1851-1856: Greytown (San Juan del Norte), by river steamer on the Rio San Juan to San Carlos, by lake steamer to La Virgen (port for Rivas), by coach overland to San Juan del Sur, and by steamship to San Francisco.

On July 1, 1851, the U.S. domestic rate for a letter sent more than 3,000 miles is reduced to 6¢ per half ounce if prepaid and 10¢ per half ounce if collect.

On July 14, 1851, the Vanderbilt route to California opens with **Vanderbilt** and Joseph L. White on board *Prometheus*. The route is New York City, Greytown (San Juan del Norte), Rio San Juan, Lake Nicaragua, La Virgen, San Juan del Sur, and San Francisco. **Map 2** shows the route between Greytown (San Juan del Norte) and San Juan del Sur.⁷ A 1,500-foot rail line carries passengers and freight around the rapids at Castillo Viejo on the Rio San Juan. The path from La Virgen to San Juan del Sur is improved to a road with gravel, and carriages carry the passengers. Also on July 14, Vanderbilt steamship *Pacific* departs San Francisco for San Juan del Sur.

Figure 2 through Figure 8 picture covers that traveled the via Nicaragua route, or that originated in Nicaragua, during the early years of the route, August 1851 through mid 1853.⁸

Before Vanderbilt arrives in July, Nicaragua again is in civil war. The unity government set up in 1849 collapses when the liberals (Leon) revolt and organize

a rival government to the conservatives (Granada).

To promote usage of the route, Vanderbilt ships carry mail for no fee if it is prepaid with U.S. stamps. Eastbound mail enters the U.S. mails at New York City as ordinary mail. By at least June 1855, under Charles Morgan, westbound service adds a fee per letter.

Vanderbilt initially runs *Prometheus*, *Daniel Webster*, *Northern Light* and *Star of the West* on the Atlantic and *Independence*, *Pacific*, *North America*, *Gold Hunter* and *Monumental City* on the Pacific.

On August 14, 1851, from Nicaragua's conservative government, Joseph L. White, Vanderbilt's partner, secures a modification of the treaty granting the canal company charter. The modification creates the **Accessory Transit Company** as a separate entity to operate the transit route. Joseph L. White continues to hold canal company stock.

On October 22, 1851, **Vanderbilt** on the *Daniel Webster* (maiden voyage) tows the new lake steamer *Central America* to Greytown, arriving November 2. He pilots the steamer up the Rio San Juan to San Carlos, arriving November 19, 1851, but he soon returns to Greytown. On November 21, 1851, ordered

by British consul James Green, the British warship *Express* fires two close warning shots upon Vanderbilt's *Prometheus* to force it to pay harbor fees. Vanderbilt himself grudgingly pays the \$123 to Greytown port collector Robert Coates, even though Greytown is a free port according to the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.

Beginning May 3, 1851, Absalom Woodward (killed November 1851) and George Chorpenning Jr. operate a monthly U.S. mail contract route between Sacramento, California, and Salt Lake City, using a route to Los Angeles in winter months. William Blanchard has the contract effective March 15, 1853, but Chorpenning is reinstated effective July 1, 1853, and through June 30, 1854. Chorpenning then uses the Los Angeles route extensively.

Ownership battles and rivalries

1852 - 1854

In January 1852, Vanderbilt sends son-in-law James M. Cross to San Francisco as his agent. In February, he sends to Nicaragua brother Jacob Vanderbilt as supervisor of the Accessory Transit Company.

Punta Arenas, located on a spit of land across from Greytown, grows from a coaling station to become the transit point for Accessory Transit Company travelers. In March 1852, the Accessory Transit ship *North America* runs aground off Mexico and is lost.

In 1852, a second attempt by Vanderbilt fails to secure a loan for a Nicaragua canal from British bankers Baring Brothers and Rothschild, so Vanderbilt drops plans for the canal. An ownership battle with Joseph L. White ensues. Vanderbilt drives down



Figure 9. Cover from San Juan del Sur August 15, 1853, to San Francisco, marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS, probably by the Accessory Transit Co. wharf agent at San Francisco. The marking normally appears on covers sent from San Francisco to the East.



Figure 10. Folded letter of July 1853 to Baltimore, Maryland, endorsed "via Nicaragua" and prepaid at San Francisco with a bisected 12¢ stamp for the 6¢ transcontinental rate and given to a letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit wharf agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS. San Francisco ran out of 3¢ stamps in May 1853, and the postmaster authorized bisects.



Figure 11. Folded letter December 1853 to London prepaid for 29¢ rate from California and endorsed "Via Nicaragua." Given to a San Francisco letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit wharf agent and marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS. Stamps canceled in New York City. Postmarked February 7, 1854, at London.



Figure 12. Cover⁹ circa 1853-1854 to Maine prepaid 6¢ and given at San Francisco to a letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent and marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS. Stamps canceled STEAM / SHIP in New York City.



Figure 13. Cover March 1854 to Stockton, Calif., prepaid 6¢ transcontinental rate and given to the Accessory Transit wharf agent in New York City who marked it with the oval VIA NICARAGUA LINE / IN ADVANCE / OF THE MAIL. Sent via *Star of the West* from New York City March 20 to Greytown March 30 and via *Cortes* from San Juan del Sur April 2 to San Francisco. Received in San Francisco by Adams & Co. and forwarded by Adams April 16 to Stockton. This cover traveled entirely outside the U.S. mails.



Figure 14. Cover August 1854 to Warren, Maine, prepaid 6¢ rate. At San Francisco given to agent for Vanderbilt's Independent Line steamships and marked with the line's oval. By *Uncle Sam* to Panama and by land to Aspinwall where an agent sent it to Greytown. From there by *Prometheus* September 18 to New York City September 25.



Figure 15. Folded letter September 1854 to Scotland prepaid 6¢ rate and given to agent for Vanderbilt's Independent Line steamships and marked with the line's oval. By *Uncle Sam* to Panama City and by land to Aspinwall and transferred to the British post office there for transport to Scotland. Rated 1 shilling postage due.

Accessory Transit Company stock prices but then buys back more stock. White and cronies are forced off the board (but White remains a counsel), and Vanderbilt friends (including **Charles Morgan**) are in control.

The New York and San Francisco Steamship Line (New York and California Steamship Line) competes on the route via Panama, April 1852 through June 1853.

According to regulations published September 20, 1852 (supplementing the Act of August 31), U.S. mail carried by Western express companies serving the gold fields must pay U.S. postage in addition to express fees.

In December 1852, Vanderbilt sells his Nicaragua-route steamships to the Accessory Transit Company, but he remains the ship agent in New York City and takes a commission per passenger and on gross receipts.

Figure 9 through Figure 13, Figure 16, Figure 18, Figure 19 and Figure 22 through Figure 54 picture covers of 1853-1855 that bear various Via Nicaragua markings. Figure 14, Figure 15, Figure 20, Figure 21 and Figure 58 picture covers sent via Panama.

On February 8, 1853, the Greytown city council orders the Accessory Transit Company off the land it is using at Punta Arenas. On February 19, **Cornelius K. Garrison**, a Panamanian banker and merchant and a former Mississippi steamboat captain, leaves New York to become Vanderbilt's agent in San Francisco, arriving March 23, 1853. In April, Garrison advertises the route as the **Nicaragua Steamship Company**.

On March 10, twenty-four U.S. Marines from U.S. sloop-of-war *Cyane* land at Punta Arenas to protect the property of the Accessory Transit Company from due process of Greytown municipal law. They depart on March 13, and *Cyane* sails north, but shortly after,



Figure 16. Folded letter circa April 1854 to San Francisco prepaid the 6¢ transcontinental rate. By Vanderbilt Accessory Transit Company steamship *Northern Light* April 5 from New York City to Greytown and by Accessory Transit *Pacific* from San Juan del Sur to San Francisco May 4 and endorsed "Recd May 5th /54."

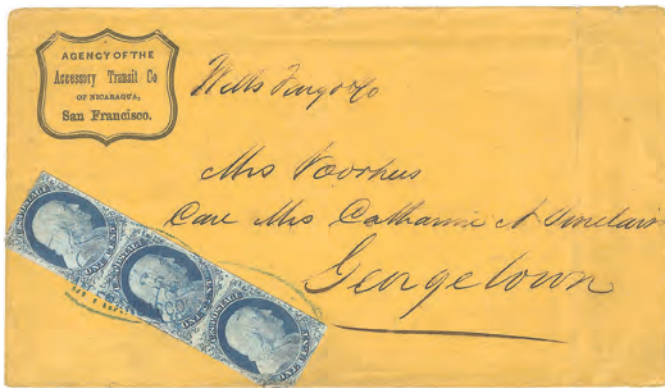


Figure 17. Circa 1853 cover of the San Francisco Agency of the Accessory Transit Company of Nicaragua prepaid 3¢ and given to Wells, Fargo & Co. in San Francisco for delivery to Georgetown, California, located in El Dorado County in the Sierra Nevada.



Figure 18. Government envelope February 1854 to East Baldwin, Maine, prepaid 6¢ and endorsed "Via Nicaragua." Given to letter bag operator Noisy Carriers at 77 Long Wharf in San Francisco who took it February 1 to the Accessory Transit wharf agent or directly to steamship *Cortes* bound for San Juan del Sur. From Greytown February 15 by *Northern Light* to New York City February 23. The cover was sent onward from New York City February 24.



Figure 19. Cover October 1854 to Brunswick, Maine, prepaid 6¢ and given to letter bag operator Noisy Carriers Publishing Hall in San Francisco who marked it for forwarding via Nicaragua and took it to the Accessory Transit wharf agent or to steamship *Sierra Nevada*. Weak oval STMR SIERRA NEVADA / VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City November 14 and sent onward the same day.

the locals steal Accessory Transit Company property and burn some company buildings at Punta Arenas.

An oval cachet names the Garrison ship *Sierra Nevada*, in service from San Francisco April 1, 1853.

On May 20, 1853, Vanderbilt, many of his family, and an entourage embark on a four-month voyage to Europe on his new 270-foot yacht *North Star*. After Vanderbilt leaves, Morgan begins to buy up Accessory Transit Company stock in a scheme with Joseph L. White.

In June, adventurer **William Walker** becomes the spokesman for a California group attempting to colonize the Mexican state of Sonora for the purpose of setting up a new government that would allow slavery. Walker is a Tennessean who came to California



Figure 20. Government envelope postmarked June 1 [1855] prepaid 10¢ to Boston, Massachusetts, given to letter bag operator Noisy Carriers at 77 Long Wharf in San Francisco who took it to the San Francisco post office for transport on the default U.S. government mail route by the Pacific Mail Steam Ship Company *John L. Stevens* bound for Panama City. From Aspinwall June 16 by U.S. Mail Steamship Company *George Law* to New York City June 28.



Figure 21. Double-weight cover July 1855 to Brunswick, Maine, prepaid 20¢ and given to letter bag operator Noisy Carriers in San Francisco at 77 Long Wharf who took it to the post office for transport on the default U.S. government mail route. Postmarked July 16 at San Francisco and by Pacific Mail Steam Ship Co. *John L. Stevens* July 16 to Panama City July 31. From Aspinwall August 2 by U.S. Mail Steamship *Empire City* to New York City August 11.

during the gold rush. To lead the adventure, Walker sets aside a law practice in Marysville, Calif., and a career in journalism (*New Orleans Crescent* and *San Francisco Daily Herald*). He also has a degree in medicine but never practices medicine.

U.S. stamped envelopes are issued July 1, 1853, after being distributed to postmasters in June. U.S. government stamps (or U.S. government envelopes) are required for express letters as of January 1854.

The act of March 1855, effective January 1, 1856, repeats the requirement that express letters bear U.S. stamps or be enclosed in U.S. stamped envelopes.

On July 18, 1853, **Charles Morgan** assumes the presidency of the Accessory Transit Company and Joseph L. White returns to the board. Vanderbilt is formally dropped as agent. After returning from Europe on September 23, Vanderbilt begins to battle with Morgan and White to regain control of the company.

On November 3, Walker and his men land at La Paz, Baja California, and declare it the Republic of

Lower California and later the Republic of Sonora, but Mexican forces cause Walker to retreat. On December 30, the Gadsden Purchase is signed in Mexico City.

On January 17, 1854, the *New York Times* reports that Vanderbilt (and partner Edward Mills) will start a rival line to California. A route across Mexico is a possibility, but the **Vanderbilt Line / Independent Line** route eventually connects across Panama. Vanderbilt's plan is to reduce fares and cripple the Accessory Transit Company and ruin White and Morgan. The line fails to secure a U.S. mail contract. Its ships are the *North Star* (refitted), *Uncle Sam* and *Yankee Blade*.

An oval marking reading "INDEPENDENT LINE / VIA. PANAMA." names *North Star* and *Uncle Sam*. A similar marking names *North Star* and *Yankee Blade*.

In May, Vanderbilt begins the **Opposition Line**, a rival line in the Gulf of Mexico to Morgan's Texas and New Orleans line. The new line is awarded the U.S. mail contract previously held by Morgan.

(Text continues on page 18)



Figure 22. Two covers September 1854 to Troy, New York, or Wilbraham, Massachusetts, each prepaid 6¢ for the transcontinental rate and given at San Francisco to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent or to steamship *Sierra Nevada* bound September 16 for San Juan del Sur. Marked STMR. SIERRA NEVADA / VIA NICARAGUA / ADVANCE OF THE MAILED. From Greytown October 1 on Accessory Transit Company steamer *Northern Light* to New York City October 8. Each cover was postmarked NEW-YORK / SHIP / OCT / 9 and was sent onward that day.



Figure 23. Two covers December 1854 to Farmer, New York, or Milwaukee, Wisconsin, each prepaid 6¢ for the transcontinental rate and given at San Francisco to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent or to steamship *Sierra Nevada* bound December 9 for San Juan del Sur. Marked STMR. SIERRA NEVADA / VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILED. From Greytown December 23 on Accessory Transit Company steamer *Star of the West* to New York City January 1, 1855. Each cover was postmarked NEW-YORK / JAN / 2 and was sent onward that day.



Figure 24. Cover July 1853 to Salem, Ohio, prepaid 6¢ and given at San Francisco to a letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS. and carried to the dock to steamship *Brother Jonathan* July 15 to San Juan del Sur. From Greytown August 1? and by *Star of the West* to New York City Aug 9 where it was sent onward the same day.



Figure 27. Folded letter August 1853 to East Aron, New York, prepaid 6¢ and given at San Francisco to a mail bag operator or to the Accessory Transit wharf agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS. and carried to the dock to steamship *Sierra Nevada* August 16 to San Juan del Sur. From Greytown by *Star of the West* September 1 to New York City September 9 where it was sent onward that day.



Figure 25. Folded letter¹⁰ August 1853 to Providence, Rhode Island, prepaid 6¢ with bisected 12¢ and given at San Francisco to a letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit wharf agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS and carried to the steamship *Sierra Nevada*. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown September 1 to New York City September 9.



Figure 28. Cover August 1853 to New Bedford, Massachusetts, prepaid 6¢ with bisected 12¢ and given at San Francisco to a mail bag operator or to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS. and carried to the steamship *Sierra Nevada*. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown September 1 to New York City September 9.

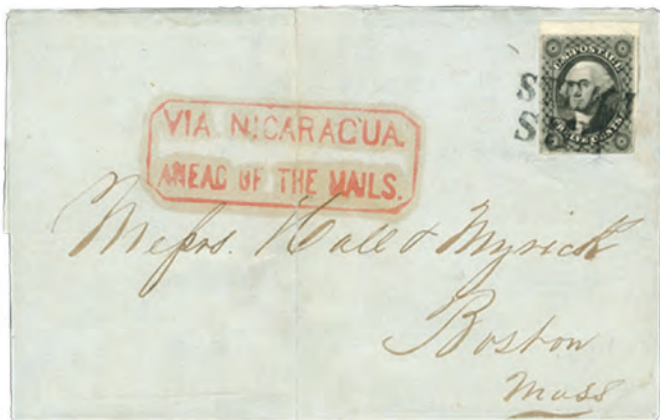


Figure 26. Folded letter datelined "San Francisco Sept 1st 1853" to Boston, Massachusetts, prepaid 12¢ double rate and given at San Francisco to a letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit wharf agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS. and carried to the dock to steamship *Brother Jonathan* September 1. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City September 25 and marked there STEAM / SHIP.



Figure 29. Cover endorsed "per Vanderbilt Line / Sep 1st" 1853 to Rochester, New York, prepaid 6¢ with bisected 12¢ and given at San Francisco to a letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit wharf agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS and carried to the dock to steamship *Brother Jonathan* September 1. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City September 25. Rated 7¢ postage due.



Figure 36. Cover December 1853 to East Greenwich, Rhode Island, prepaid 12¢ for double rate and given to San Francisco letter bag operator Leland who marked it VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS / LELAND. The Leland firm took it to the Accessory Transit agent or to steamship *Brother Jonathan* December 31. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City January 24, 1854. Postmarked and sent onward that day.



Figure 39. Cover February 1854 to "near Williamsport," Maryland, prepaid 12¢ double rate and given at San Francisco to a letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit wharf agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS. and carried to the dock to Accessory Transit Co. steamship *Cortes* February 1. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City February 23 where the cover was sent onward February 24.



Figure 37. Folded letter ¹¹ March 1854 to New York City prepaid 12¢ double rate and given at San Francisco to a letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS. and STMR. SIERRA NEVADA / VIA NICARAGUA / ADVANCE OF THE MAILS. By steamship *Sierra Nevada* March 1 to San Juan del Sur. Via Greytown to New York City.



Figure 40. Cover probably 1854 to Boston, Massachusetts, prepaid 6¢ and given at San Francisco to a letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS. and carried to the dock, probably by steamship *Pacific* April 1 to San Juan del Sur and from Greytown by *Northern Light* April 17 to New York City April 25. New York postmark appears to be April 25.

Figure 40 description revised May 2016.



Figure 38. Cover ¹² possibly February 1855 to South Dartmouth, Massachusetts, prepaid 6¢ and given at San Francisco to a letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS. and given to an Accessory Transit Company steamship, possibly *Cortes* February 9, 1855, and via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City March 4. Postmark not clear.

Figure 38 description revised May 2016.



Figure 41. Government envelope November 1854 to Churchville, New York, prepaid 6¢ and given to San Francisco letter bag operator Leland who marked it VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS / LELAND. The Leland firm carried it to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent or to steamship *Uncle Sam* November 24. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City December 15 and sent onward that day.



Figure 42. Cover October 1853 to Lynchburg, Virginia, prepaid 6¢ and given at San Francisco to a letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / IN ADVANCE OF THE MAIL. and carried to the Accessory Transit Co. steamship to San Juan del Sur. From Greytown to New York City October 27 where it was sent onward the same day.



Figure 45. Cover December 1854 to North Dighton, Massachusetts, prepaid 6¢ and given to San Francisco letter bag operator Sullivan who marked it VIA NICARAGUA / IN ADVANCE OF THE MAIL / SULLIVAN. The Sullivan firm carried it to the Accessory Transit agent or to steamship Sierra Nevada December 9. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City January 1, 1855.



Figure 43. Cover¹³ probably 1854 to Buckland, Massachusetts, prepaid 12¢ for double rate and given to San Francisco letter bag operator Sullivan who marked it for transport via Nicaragua and carried it to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent or to steamship Cortes June 16 to San Juan del Sur and from Greytown by Star of the West July 3 to New York City July 12 where it was sent onward the same day.



Figure 46. Cover¹⁵ probably September 1854 to Chicago, Illinois, prepaid 6¢ and given to San Francisco letter bag operator Sullivan who marked it VIA NICARAGUA / IN ADVANCE OF THE MAIL / SULLIVAN. The Sullivan firm carried it to the Accessory Transit wharf agent or to steamship Sierra Nevada September 16 to San Juan del Sur. From Greytown by Northern Light October 1 to New York City October 8 where it was sent onward the next day.



Figure 44. Cover¹⁴ probably 1854 endorsed "Sacramento May 15" to Keene, New Hampshire, prepaid 6¢ and given to San Francisco letter bag operator Sullivan who marked it VIA NICARAGUA / IN ADVANCE OF THE MAIL / SULLIVAN. The Sullivan firm carried it to the Accessory Transit agent or to steamship Brother Jonathan May 15. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City June 8 where it was sent onward the next day.



Figure 47. Government envelope August 1855 to Boston, Massachusetts, prepaid 10¢ and given at San Francisco to a letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / IN ADVANCE OF THE MAIL. and carried to steamship Uncle Sam August 18. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City September 8 where it was sent onward the same day.



Figure 48. Cover ¹⁶ probably December 1853 to Brunswick, Maine, prepaid 6¢ and given at San Francisco to letter bag operator Noisy Carriers who marked it for transport via Nicaragua and carried it to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent or to steamship *Cortes* December 16 to San Juan del Sur. From Greytown by *Star of the West* December 31 to New York City January 9, 1854, and sent onward that day.



Figure 51. Government envelope¹⁸ probably December 1853 to Boston, Mass., prepaid 6¢ and given at San Francisco to letter bag operator Noisy Carriers Publishing Hall who marked it for transport via Nicaragua and carried it to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent or to steamship *Cortes* December 16 to San Juan del Sur. From Greytown by *Star of the West* December 31 to New York City January 9, 1854.



Figure 49. Government envelope December 1854 to Patchogue, New York, prepaid 6¢ and given at San Francisco to letter bag operator Noisy Carriers who marked it for transport via Nicaragua and carried it to the Accessory Transit wharf agent or to steamship Cortes December 23. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City January 15, 1855.



Figure 52. Cover July 1854 to New Bedford, Massachusetts, prepaid 6¢ and given at San Francisco to letter bag operator Noisy Carriers who marked it for transport via Nicaragua and carried it to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent or to steamship *Sierra Nevada* July 15. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City August 7.

Figure 52 cover substituted May 2016 to eliminate duplicate with Figure 19.



Figure 50. Government envelope ¹⁷ docketed on reverse January 15, 1854, to North Dighton, Massachusetts, prepaid 6¢ and given at San Francisco to letter bag operator Noisy Carriers who marked it for transport via Nicaragua and carried it to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent or to steamship *Sierra Nevada* January 16. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City February 9 where stamps were canceled STEAM / SHIP and cover was marked Due 6 for double weight.



Figure 53. Cover January 1855 to Lynchburg, Virginia, prepaid 6¢ and given at San Francisco to letter bag operator Noisy Carriers who marked it for transport via Nicaragua and carried it to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent or to steamship *Sierra Nevada* January 24. Via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City February 14 where it was sent onward the next day. At lower left, the cover is endorsed “Per Steamer / Sierra Nevada / Via Nicaragua.”

In May 1854, U.S. Minister to Nicaragua Solon Borland is wounded by a thrown bottle in a confrontation with Greytown municipal officers and bystanders concerning the murder of a bongo pilot on the Rio San Juan by the captain of the Accessory Transit Company steamer *Routh*. Encouraged by White, U.S. Secretary of State William Marcy sends U.S. sloop-of-war *Cyane* to force reparations and an apology. *Cyane* arrives July 11, 1854. On July 12, a landing party of 18 seamen and Marines goes ashore to seize arms and ammunition and to post a declaration that the town will be bombarded. On July 13, *Cyane* bombards and destroys Greytown, and the Marines set fire to the remaining buildings. Nicaragua files claims for damages, but the United States does not pay.

On July 1, 1854, William M.F. Magraw and James Reeside begin a contract carrying the U.S. mails monthly between Independence, Missouri, and Salt Lake City, replacing the route of Woodson and Little. War with the Sioux interrupts the route, and the contract is annulled effective November 30, 1856.

On July 1, 1854, William Chorpensing Jr. begins a contract carrying the U.S. mails monthly from Salt Lake City to San Diego, California. Effective November 1, 1854, the route is changed to San Pedro (Los Angeles). The Chorpensing coaches run as far as San Bernardino, to a connection with San Pedro. The contract ends June 30, 1858.

On July 1, 1854, Jacob Hall and John M. Hockaday begin operating a four-year monthly (twice a month as of July 1, 1857) U.S. contract mail route between Santa Fe and Independence, Missouri.

In August 1854, Charles Morgan, **Marshall O. Roberts** (the recent successor to George Law), and William H. Aspinwall settle with Vanderbilt and buy his Independent Line steamships. The two mail lines buy *North Star*, and Accessory Transit Company buys *Yankee Blade* and *Uncle Sam*. The buyers also pay for any of Vanderbilt's claims on an isthmian transit route. Vanderbilt retains shares in Accessory Transit Company.

In 1854, the Central America Land and Mining Company of American Henry L. Kinney and others advertises for colonists to Nicaragua. Their plan is based on invalid concessions granted by the Miskito king.

William Walker and Cornelius Vanderbilt

1855 - 1857

On January 28, 1855, the Panama Railroad opens (**Map 3**). Railroad construction on the isthmus continues with the installation of improvements: iron

bridges, gravel embankments, and lignum vitae ties.

In February, Vanderbilt proposes a subsidized transatlantic line to carry mail at half the payment made to the Collins Line. He fails to acquire the mail contract, but he slashes fares and his non-subsidized line begins service in May with the *Ariel* and the *North Star*, which he re-buys.

On April 1, 1855, the U.S. domestic letter rate for a distance of more than 3,000 miles is increased to 10¢ per half ounce. Prepayment is compulsory. **Figure 20, Figure 21, Figure 55 through Figure 58, and Figure 61** picture covers sent at the 10¢ rate.

On April 25, 1855, U.S. stamped envelopes denominated 10¢ are issued.

On May 3, Walker and his 56 Immortals sail from San Francisco, Walker having been denied passage on an Accessory Transit Company ship by Garrison.

Walker aide **Parker H. French** remains in San Francisco to smuggle recruits and guns to Walker by bribing the captains of Accessory Transit Company ships. When French leaves for Nicaragua on the *Uncle*



Figure 54. Cover late March 1855 to New Orleans, Louisiana, endorsed "Via Nicaragua" and prepaid 6¢ for the transcontinental rate (letter rate changed April 1 to 10¢) and given to Hawes & Co.'s Express in San Francisco who carried it to the Accessory Transit wharf agent or to the steamship bound for San Juan del Sur. Cover rerouted at Greytown to New Orleans instead of New York City. At New Orleans, canceled STEAM SHIP and sent onward April 15.



Figure 55. Wells, Fargo franked government envelope¹⁹ circa 1855 marked in red "Wells, Fargo / Express / Sacramento" and prepaid 10¢ for the transcontinental rate to Cincinnati, Ohio, and taken to San Francisco and from there probably by Accessory Transit Company steamship to San Juan del Sur. From Greytown to New York City where stamps were canceled N. YORK / STEAMSHIP.



Figure 56. Cover August 1855 to Dorchester, Massachusetts, with printed "Via Nicaragua" carried by California Penny Post Company at San Francisco to the Accessory Transit wharf agent or to steamship *Uncle Sam* August 18 to San Juan del Sur August 29. From Greytown by *Northern Light* August 31 to New York City September 8 where it was sent onward the same day. Missent to Gloucester.

Sam, he forces Garrison off the ship and hijacks it.

On June 16, 1855, **William Walker** and the filibusters arrive in Realejo, Nicaragua, under a guise of a colonization grant, to support the liberals through a contract arranged by **Byron Cole**, a newspaperman and adventurer who convinced Walker to try to form an empire in Nicaragua.

Walker loses a battle at Rivas, but on Oct. 13, after commandeering an Accessory Transit Company steamer at Virgin Bay, he lands at Granada, attacks from the rear and seizes the city. Walker forms a coalition government with **Patricio Rivas** as nominal head and conservative leader **Gen. Ponciano Corral** as minister of war. On Nov. 8, 1855, Walker executes Corral for treason. In November, Walker invites colonists from the United States to come to Nicaragua.

J.A. Ruggles of G.H. Wines & Co. in Granada becomes Nicaragua postmaster general at least during part of 1856. **Figure 59** pictures a Wines cover from Nicaragua to Richmond, N.Y. **Figure 60** pictures a Wines cover from Nicaragua to San Francisco.

On November 21, 1855, Vanderbilt begins secretly to repurchase Accessory Transit Company stock in a plot with Aspinwall and Roberts to consolidate and monopolize the Panama and Nicaragua routes.

On December 21, Morgan resigns from the Accessory Transit Company board, and on December 22 Vanderbilt takes his seat. On January 3, 1856, Vanderbilt assumes the role of general agent of Accessory Transit Company, and on January 5 his monopoly arrangement with Aspinwall and Roberts is completed. On January 30, 1856, Vanderbilt again becomes president of Accessory Transit Company. He vows that the route will not carry reinforcements to Walker, even though a prior agreement has it transporting reinforcements (called emigrants) to Nicaragua for a \$20 fare.

In late 1855, **Edmund Randolph**, a confidant of Walker, begins a scheme to take over the transit route by having Walker grant him exclusive right to transport passengers and freight across Nicaragua. Randolph attempts to interest Cornelius K. Garrison in buying the rights and operating the route. In the plan, Garrison is to bring in Charles Morgan and is to provide free transport for reinforcements and arms for Walker. Garrison declines the deal but secretly plans to buy the rights if Randolph acquires them, which he does. In January 1856, Morgan joins in.

In spring 1855, remnants of the Kinney colonizing expedition arrive at Greytown, then still in near ruins from the bombardment of 1854. The men help rebuild Greytown, and by September 1855 the populace proclaims Kinney military governor of Greytown. But Kinney's backers fail to send reinforcements and supplies, and many of his filibusters desert him. By letter, Kinney attempts to join with Walker and be recognized by him, but Walker rebukes him. In 1862 in Mexico, Kinney dies in a gunfight.

On February 18, 1856, Patricio Rivas revokes the Accessory Transit Company charter and seizes its ships. On February 19, Walker obtains a new charter for the transit route, executed through Edmund Randolph, for Morgan and Garrison. The news reaches Vanderbilt in New York on March 13, 1856.

To interrupt the route, Vanderbilt withdraws his Atlantic steamers and sends son-in-law James M. Cross to California to divert the Pacific steamers to



Figure 57. Folded letter August 20, 1855, to San Francisco prepaid the transcontinental rate and given to the Accessory Transit agent in New York City who marked it with the oval NICARAGUA LINE / IN ADVANCE / OF THE MAIL. By Accessory Transit Company *Northern Light* August 20 from New York City to Greytown and by Accessory Transit Company *Uncle Sam* from San Juan del Sur to San Francisco September 14 and given to the Penny Post Company for delivery and marked with its double circle.



Figure 58. Cover ²⁰ January 4, 1857, to Barnard, Vermont, prepaid 12¢ (10¢ transcontinental rate) given to the Pacific Express Company at Auburn, California, and marked with its oval and taken to Sacramento and marked with another oval January 19, then to San Francisco. Carried by an express agent on the Pacific Mail Steamship Company steamship *Golden Gate* bound January 20 for Panama. Then from Aspinwall by U.S. Mail Steamship Company steamship *George Law* to New York City February 13 where it was sent onward the same day.

Figure 58 description revised May 2016.

Panama. Vanderbilt lobbies Secretary of State Marcy and others for the United States to intervene, but he receives no help from the Pierce administration.

In February 1856, a league of Central American states forms against Walker and Nicaragua.

On March 17, Vanderbilt receives full powers from the Accessory Transit Company board to do what is necessary. After interrupting the route, Vanderbilt begins discussions with Nicaragua's neighbors for action against Walker, and he forges an interim plan with Aspinwall and Roberts to pay Accessory Transit Company a monthly stipend not to compete via Panama.

On April 1, 1856, Vanderbilt son-in-law **James M. Cross** and one Captain Collins successfully ease the Accessory Transit Company ship *Cortes* and two coal boats out of San Juan del Sur harbor and out of Walker's grasp. After taking passengers to Panama, Cross steams north on the *Cortes* to San Francisco to present a letter from Vanderbilt allowing Garrison to remain as Vanderbilt's agent, but Garrison artfully professes continued loyalty to Vanderbilt.

In March 1856, Patricio Rivas revolts against Walker and flees. Costa Rica and other states declare war on Nicaragua. Costa Rica invades southwestern Nicaragua, in April taking La Virgen and Rivas, but an outbreak of cholera stops the invasion.

In April, Vanderbilt agent **Hosea Birdsall** is stymied in Greytown by Accessory Transit Company agent Joseph N. Scott, who does not turn over company property, so the interocean route remains open. As a fallback, Birdsall uses a letter from Vanderbilt to ask for assistance from the British sloop-of-war *Eurydice*, whose Captain John W. Tarleton intervenes and boards the Morgan steamer *Orizaba*, an embarrassing incident for the Pierce administration, but Tarleton finds no evidence of filibusters.

The new **Nicaragua Steamship Company** of Morgan and Garrison operates via Nicaragua from April 1856 through early January 1857.

The *Orizaba* is the first ship in the new Morgan Atlantic line to Greytown, but the ship eventually moves to San Francisco, joining the Garrison Pacific route *Sierra Nevada*. Other ships on the Morgan line to Nicaragua are *Texas* and *Tennessee*.

In May 1856, the Garrison monthly Nicaragua transit line begins operations, mostly bringing recruits for Walker on the *Sierra Nevada* and later also on the *Orizaba*. Walker arranges an election June 29 of himself as president. He is inaugurated July 11 in Granada. The Pierce administration soon withdraws its recent recognition of Walker.

Walker appropriates all property of the Accessory Transit Company and for a minimal cash outlay assigns it to Morgan and Garrison, stipulating that they are to use the new line to transport recruits to Walker in Nicaragua.

On July 12, 1856, an allied army of Salvadorans, Hondurans and Guatemalans attacks from the north and seizes Leon. In New York, Randolph sells his transit grant to Garrison on July 16. He later tries to sell it again to Vanderbilt, who declines.

In July, Vanderbilt takes his new 335-foot steamer



Figure 59. Folded letter datelined October 2, 1856, at San Juan del Sur to Richmond, New York. Oval G. H. WINES & CO.'S / CALIFORNIA EXPRESS / No. 2 BOWLING GREEN – NEW YORK. Carried by a Wines agent across Nicaragua and by steamship to New York City October 18. The stamp is a substitution.

Figure 59 description revised May 2016.



Figure 60. Folded letter circa 1856 to San Francisco, California, with mute oval postmark REPUBLICA DE NICARAGUA / ADMON. DE CORREOS DE GRANADA used by William Walker's government. Given to Wines & Co's Express and bearing its straight-line marking. A Wines agent carried letter to San Juan del Sur and by steamship to San Francisco, entirely out of the U.S. mails.

Vanderbilt to Washington, D.C., to continue his lobbying for a subsidy for his transatlantic route.

In September, Garrison is arrested in New York City on charges brought by Accessory Transit Company for alleged fraud when he was its agent. Vanderbilt offers him arbitration if he reforms his conduct.

On September 14, 1856, in the Battle of San Jacinto, the all-Nicaraguan unity force defeats a filibuster attack and captures and hangs Byron Cole. On September 24, the combined forces of an army of the west (Leon or liberals), an army of the Central American states, and an army of the north (Legitimists or conservatives) take Managua.

In spring or summer, Cornelius Vanderbilt meets with chargé d'affaires Luis Molina of Costa Rica and **Sylvanus Spencer**, an acquitted murderer who previously had drifted to Nicaragua and spent four months

there, including as mate on the Rio San Juan steamboat *Machuca*. Spencer departs for Costa Rica on October 9 to enact Vanderbilt's plan to overthrow Walker. He meets with Costa Rican President Juan Rafael Mora.

In November 1856, Costa Rica launches a second invasion in the south. On November 19, Walker abandons Granada for Virgin Bay and Rivas, leaving a force behind to destroy Granada. The Central American army defeats Walker's forces at Granada.

In fall 1856, Vanderbilt establishes a steamboat and railroad line to compete with Charles Morgan between New Orleans and Galveston.

In December 1856 through January 1857, with a bribe proffered by agent Sylvanus Spencer, Vanderbilt succeeds in having Costa Rica invade Nicaragua again. On December 3, President Juan Rafael Mora places Costa Rican troops under Spencer's command, and they raft down the Rio San Carlos to the Rio San Juan. On December 22, they attack the filibuster fort at Hipp's Point, located upriver where the Rio Sarapiquí joins the Rio San Juan. On December 24, the forces capture transit company river steamers at Greytown, and they occupy Punta Arenas. The British assist in the fight by hampering filibuster replacements shipped in to Greytown. Spencer takes the steamers upriver and seizes Castillo Viejo, the steamer *La Virgen*, Fort San Carlos, and on January 3 the steamer *San Carlos* (with Morgan son-in-law Israel C. Harris onboard) before returning to Greytown.

Regular service on the transit route ends in early 1857 until attempts to reopen it in 1858, 1859, 1862, and 1864, the last a success, through April 1868.

Beginning in 1857, Greytown becomes an almost-abandoned backwater with a stagnant economy. The lull lasts until 1889.

On January 27, 1857, the allies begin the final siege of Rivas. It drags on for three months until Lt. Charles H. Davis intervenes and negotiates with the two sides for the rescue of Walker. Davis had arrived at San Juan del Sur in February on U.S. sloop-of-war *St. Mary*. On May 1, Walker surrenders and is escorted from Nicaragua on the *St. Mary* at San Juan del Sur. Walker meets with President Buchanan June 12.

In December 1856, under special contract the monthly U.S. mails move between Independence, Missouri, and Salt Lake City. Snow causes the January eastbound mails to be routed via California.

During February through June 1857, Hiram Kimball fulfills his monthly U.S. mail contract between Independence and Salt Lake City. No contract mails

are delivered from July through September.

In February 1857, the U.S. government reduces the subsidy to the Collins Line, and the line discontinues operations and eventually enters bankruptcy.

On May 5, Vanderbilt tells stockholders that he plans to continue the transit company. On June 5, Mora of Costa Rica does not agree to release to Spencer the captured steamers and other property. In July, Mora signs a transit contract with opportunist W.R.C. Webster and Israel C. Harris, but Mora soon annuls it.

Walker is in New York City and rallies crowds there on June 15. On June 19, reviving the **American Atlantic and Pacific Ship Canal Company**, Joseph L. White negotiates through financier Henry G. Stebbins with Nicaraguan minister to the United States Antonio José de Irisarri for renewal of the company's charter and for a transit route across Nicaragua. Stebbins becomes president of the company.

Nicaragua approves the Stebbins-Irisarri pact on July 27. In August, the Financial Panic of 1857 begins. On November 16, the Cass-Irisarri Treaty, named after Secretary of State Lewis Cass, is signed with Nicaragua. It gives the United States rights to all transit routes, their security and protection, and the right to protect the lives and property of U.S. citizens. Nicaragua's amended ratification on June 28, 1858, infuriates the Buchanan administration. Continued negotiations and amendments and the failed Lamar-Zeledon Treaty replacement, and the U.S. Civil War, delay the exchange of ratifications until June 28, 1868, at Granada.

During August-December 1857, Costa Rica challenges the Stebbins-Irisarri pact and prepares for war with Nicaragua, but with Walker's return to Punta Arenas on November 25, the two countries on December 8 sign a Convention of Peace at Rivas. In November 1857, Walker begins a filibuster expedition from Mobile, arriving November 25 at Punta Arenas and Greytown. By December, a Walker upriver force takes Castillo, but U.S. Marines under Commodore Hiram Paulding with British support overwhelm Walker's base camp at Punta Arenas. Walker surrenders December 8 and is returned to the United States. Paulding later is relieved from duty for violating U.S. neutrality laws.

Effective July 1, 1857, James Birch operates a twice-a-month U.S. mail contract route from San Diego, California, to San Antonio, Texas, via Fort Davis, El Paso, Tucson, Maricopa Wells, and Fort Yuma. The section from El Paso to Fort Yuma is discontinued after

a postal order of October 27, 1858. Effective April 1, 1860, another order discontinues the section from San Diego to Fort Yuma.

During February-June 1857, Hiram Kimball delivers the U.S. mails monthly by contract between Independence and Salt Lake City. Stephen B. Miles has the contract from October 1857 through June 1858, but the post office ends the contract at the end of March 1858. The Utah Expedition (Utah War) of May 1857 - July 1858 diverts the Salt Lake City mails to Camp Scott, located near burned-out Fort Bridger.

In 1857, **Russell, Majors & Waddell** begins carrying freight from Leavenworth, Kansas Territory, to various points in the West.

First attempt to reopen the transit route

American Atlantic and Pacific Ship Canal Company

1858

In 1858, Nicaragua adopts a new constitution as a republic. Tomas Martinez becomes president (through 1867). He promotes coffee production, builds the port of Corinto and rebuilds Granada. The national capital is permanently moved to Managua.

In March 1858, Nicaragua grants to the **American Atlantic and Pacific Ship Canal Company** an extension to July 28 to begin operations. It also recognizes the sale of steamers to W.R.C. Webster and grants a provisional transit charter to become effective if the canal company forfeits. In April, Vanderbilt reconciles with Garrison and Morgan, buying Morgan's share of the Pacific steamers *Orizaba*, *Sierra Nevada* and the new *Ocean Queen*. Morgan buys Vanderbilt's Gulf line. Vanderbilt loans money to penniless White, taking canal company shares as collateral.

The May 1 Rivas Manifesto between Nicaragua's Martinez and Costa Rica's Mora attempts to involve France, Britain and Sardinia in protecting Central American sovereignty over a canal concession and in guaranteeing the independence and nationality of the two nations. The agreement also defines the Costa Rica-Nicaragua border and grants Frenchman M. Felix Belly a grant of 99 years to construct an interoceanic canal by an international company to be formed by Belly and M.P.M. Millaud. The agreement enrages the Buchanan administration, and Martinez and Mora repudiate it. In May 1858 in his trial in New Orleans, William Walker successfully defends himself against charges of violating neutrality laws.

John M. Hockaday is awarded the contract to

deliver the U.S. mails weekly between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Salt Lake City (only as far as Camp Scott until late June 1858) from May 1858 through October 1860. Effective July 1, 1859, the post office changes the service to every two weeks.

As of July 1, 1858, George Chorpenning Jr. operates the contract to carry the U.S. mails weekly between Salt Lake City and Placerville, California. The schedule changes to every two weeks beginning July 1, 1859. In January 1859 Chorpenning goes to Washington to protest. By October 1859 the company is failing, and the post office annuls the contract May 10, 1860.

On July 1, 1858, Hall & Porter begins operating a four-year weekly U.S. contract mail route between Santa Fe and Independence, Missouri. As of December 24, 1860, the route is subcontracted to the Missouri Stage Company.

The Pike's Peak gold rush of July 1858 to February 1861 brings goldseekers to western Kansas and Nebraska territories. Jim Saunders carries mail November 23, 1858, from the Cherry Creek mines (Denver) to Fort Laramie. Returning miners and military officers carry mail to Fort Laramie and Fort Kearney (Kearney is the accepted misspelling for Kearny).

The **Overland Mail Company** of John Butterfield and partners begins operating on September 16, 1858, on the Southern route from St. Louis and Memphis via Fort Smith, Fort Belknap, Fort Chadbourne, El Paso, Tucson, Fort Yuma, Los Angeles and Visalia to San Francisco (September 15 from San Francisco).

Beginning October 1, 1858, Barrow, Porter & Crenshaw operates a short-lived monthly U.S. mail contract route between Kansas City, Missouri, and Stockton, California, via Santa Fe and Albuquerque. The government ends the route effective July 1, 1859.

Beginning October 16, 1858, Thomas Bowler and Frank Green operate a short-lived monthly U.S. mail contract route between Neosho, Missouri, and Albuquerque. After attacks by Kiowas and Comanches, the government ends the route effective July 1, 1859.

Without waiting for ratification of a contract, in May 1858 the **American Atlantic and Pacific Ship Canal Company** of **Joseph L. White** attempts but fails to reopen the Nicaragua route. The *Washington* sails from New York on November 7 for Greytown, but Nicaragua refuses to let the passengers into Nicaragua. The steamer *Hermann*, sent to ply the Pacific from San Juan del Sur, runs out of funds and is sold.

Vanderbilt runs a short-lived opposition line via Panama. In June, Vanderbilt sends Daniel Allen to Managua to try to secure a transit contract, but

President Martinez declines. In November 1858, from Mobile, Walker dispatches a filibuster expedition to Honduras, but the ship wrecks off Belize.

Four one year, beginning October 27, 1858, the **Louisiana Tehuantepec Company** operates a U.S. mail route via Tehuantepec westbound from New Orleans, and eastbound from San Francisco, by steamer to and from Minatitlán, by river steamer to and from Suchil. and by coach to and from Ventosa. The post office does not renew the contract. The last trips depart San Francisco September 20, 1859, and New Orleans September 27, 1859.

Second attempt to reopen the transit route

United States and Central America Transit Company 1859

In March 1859, Vanderbilt and Garrison begin an opposition line to the Pacific mail line, incorporating as the **Atlantic & Pacific Steamship Company**. The Panama Railroad and the Panama mail line form the **North Atlantic Steamship Company** to compete against Vanderbilt in the Atlantic.

On April 18, 1859, the **Leavenworth & Pikes Peak Express Company** of John Jones and William Russell begins mail and express service between Leavenworth, Kansas Territory, and Denver City. On May 15, the firm purchases the J.M. Hockaday subsidized contract for service between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Salt Lake City, a contract previously held by S.B. Miles and before him by Hiram Kimball.

The publication of an erroneous letter from the general manager of the Leavenworth & Pikes Peak Express Company leads to mail entering the U.S. mails at Auraria and Coraville (Denver) in June 1859 and being carried by the company to Leavenworth free of express charges. In July, the Auraria postmaster contracts for mail to be carried weekly to Fort Kearney. Trips are made July 12 through August 23.

In late July 1859, the company begins using markings reading **Jones and Russell's Pike's Peak Express Co.** The firm Russell, Majors & Waddell helps with financing and takes over the company on October 28, 1859.

In September 1859, the **United States and Central America Transit Company** advertises that it will be the sole carrier of the mail to California via the Nicaragua route beginning October 5, under a nine-month contract from the post office awarded to **Daniel H. Johnson** (a dummy agent for **Joseph L. White**), who transfers the contract to the company.

Vanderbilt secures a provisional contract to deliver the U.S. mail via Panama or Nicaragua if the first contract is forfeited, which occurs October 5 because the river steamers are not available for transit. The postmaster general sends the Vanderbilt line to Panama because of fear that Walker will conduct another expedition.

Commander Bedford Clapperton Trevelyan Pim of the British navy receives in 1859 a concession for an Atlantic terminus and in 1863 a concession to construct a railroad from Monkey Point on the Caribbean to Realejo via San Miguelito.

The Atlantic and Pacific U.S. mail contracts awarded in 1847 expire on September 30, 1859.

In November, the Aspinwall deal to sell to Vanderbilt founders for lack of a noncompete stipulation.

On December 17, 1859, the U.S. postmaster general orders that the Butterfield overland southern route established in September 1858 will be the default route for transcontinental letter mail, effective in San Francisco January 23, 1860. Texas secedes February 1, 1861, and on March 2, 1861, the U.S. Congress discontinues the Butterfield route. The last mails are March 21 from St. Louis and April 1 from San Francisco. Effective July 1, 1861, the overland daily mail contact is by the central route via Salt Lake City, Fort Laramie, and Fort Kearney.

Third attempt to reopen the transit route

Central American Transit Company

1860 - 1863

In January 1860, Britain and Nicaragua sign the Treaty of Managua, which largely resembles the never-ratified Dallas-Clarendon treaty. The British officially withdraw, but they remain in Greytown and their influence prevails in the Mosquito Reserve.

Also in January 1860, Joseph N. Scott of Punta Arenas goes to work at Aspinwall for Vanderbilt's Atlantic & Pacific Steamship Company.

Also in January, Aspinwall and Vanderbilt negotiate again and come to an agreement for a controlled monopoly. The Pacific Mail will confine itself to the Pacific. Vanderbilt's Atlantic & Pacific Steamship Company will confine itself to the Atlantic. The North Atlantic Steamship Company is to cease operations. Vanderbilt receives shares of the Pacific Mail. Aspinwall tricks the Panama Railroad board into taking a voyage so the agreement can be signed.

On February 13, 1860, the **Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Company** receives

a charter from the Kansas Territory government. On February 20, the company receives the mail contract of the failed Leavenworth & Pikes Peak Express Company (Jones and Russell's Pike's Peak Express Co.) for service every two weeks between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Salt Lake City.

On April 3, 1860, the Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Company (William Russell and partners) begin a weekly private pony express between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California.

On July 7, the company changes the pony express service from weekly to twice a week. On July 31, the company changes the express rate from \$5 per half ounce to \$2.50 per quarter ounce.

On April 2, 1860, the **Central American Transit Company** obtains a new concession to operate the Nicaragua route. Its officers are **John P. Yelverton**, **Henry G. Stebbins** and **Nathaniel H. Wolfe**.

In spring 1860, with Honduras in civil war, William Walker leads an expedition to Trujillo, landing there August 6. He hopes to join the revolting liberals and possibly be named head of the new government. British marines from the Bay Islands trap him in a swamp and turn him over to the Hondurans, who court-martial him and on September 12 execute him by firing squad. He is buried in Trujillo. On September 30, Mora is executed in Costa Rica after being overthrown August 14 the previous year.

On May 11, 1860, effective June 1, through June 30, 1861, the U.S. post office transfers to the Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Company the Chorpensing subsidized mail contract for service every two weeks between Salt Lake City and Placerville.

C.S.S. Hinckley operates Hinckley & Co.'s Rocky Mountain Express Company from the Pike's Peak region mines to Denver City from May 31, 1860, to mid-August 1860. E.F. Bruce operates a short-lived U.S. mail contract circa June-July 1860 from Denver City northeast to Julesburg. After his default, the U.S. post office changes the route from Julesburg to Fort Kearney and awards the weekly mail contract to E.S. Alford and the Western Stage Company. As a temporary measure, the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company operates the mail route to Fort Kearney on three trips starting September 7.

Western Stage Company begins mail operations September 10 from Omaha and September 27 from Denver City. On September 7, 1860, Hinckley & Company begins an express over the Western Stage Company mail route to compete with Central Over-

land California and Pike's Peak Express Company. The post office annuls the Western Stage Company contract effective July 1, 1861.

In January 1861 in Nicaragua, arguing over rights to harvest rubber, Jonathan Gavitt shoots Joseph L. White in the leg and White dies seven days later.

As of February 1, 1861, the U.S. letter rate between the Pacific Coast and any point east of the Rocky Mountains is 10¢ in either direction.

Colorado Territory is formed February 28, 1861. Dakota Territory is formed March 2, 1861. Nevada Territory is formed March 2, 1861.

As of April 1, 1861, the **Overland Mail Company** assumes joint control of the private pony express, but the Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company runs it as an allied contractor. As before, the route operates twice a week between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Placerville, California. The express rate is reduced to \$2 per half ounce.

Wells, Fargo is agent for pony express mail and issues adhesive stamps. Wells, Fargo operates a private express between Placerville and San Francisco.

As of July 1, 1861, the **Overland Mail Company** operates the daily overland mail subsidized by the U.S. government and the twice-a-week pony express. The pony express rate is reduced to \$1 per half ounce. On October 24, 1861, the overland telegraph is completed. Pony express service ends October 26, 1861.

On July 12, 1861, the **Central American Transit Company** concession is ratified. Its agent does not arrive in Greytown to prepare operations until January 1862. Operations resume in October 1862 but are irregular. The *Moses Taylor* leaves San Francisco October 21, and the *America* departs from New York October 25, but there is only one river steamer and there are not enough mules and carriages. Nicaragua finally annuls the contract on February 12, 1863. Nicaragua seizes the steamers and company property on March 2, 1863.

In March 1862, the steamship *Vanderbilt* is sold to the United States for \$1 and is converted into a cruiser. At the outbreak of the Civil War, it had been chartered as a transport.

Nicaragua issues its first postage stamps in early December 1862.

On May 1, 1863, new U.S. Minister to Nicaragua **Andrew B. Dickinson** arrives and declares the transit contract to be still in force, and he agrees May 27 to personally supervise the transit route. Passengers cross in June and July. The route closes because of delays caused by low water. Company representative Isaac

C. Haradon fails to negotiate new arrangements.

As of July 1, 1863, the U.S. domestic letter rate for any distance is lowered to 3¢ per half ounce.

In July 1863, an earthquake raises the sand bar at the entrance to Greytown harbor, with a new water depth of only 10 feet (previously 23 feet), and thereafter most ships must anchor outside the harbor. The high bar accelerates the build up of silt. By 1865, eleven-twelfths of the water flow is through the Rio Colorado distributary (in 1848 nine-tenths of the water flow was through the lower Rio San Juan).

In October 1863, the Central American Transit Company changes its board and elects new president Francis Morris. On November 10, it signs a new contract with Nicaragua that is ratified February 20, 1864, and the company agent takes over from Dickinson.

Daniel Allen and **Cornelius K. Garrison** incorporate the **Atlantic Mail Steamship Company** on November 27, 1863, and in 1864 they buy out the Atlantic & Pacific Steamship Company and other Vanderbilt shipping interests.

The Nicaragua transit route reopens

Central American Transit Company

1864 - 1868

In late August 1864, with its own ocean steamers, 50 stagecoaches, two lake steamers and five river steamers, the **Central American Transit Company** again begins regular monthly service on the Nicaragua route. The service lasts for four years, including by successor firm **North American Steamship Company**. Circular markings reading C.A.T. Co. or C.A. Transit Co. are used on mail. **Figure 62** shows an example.

In 1864, George Augustus Frederick, president of the Mosquito Reserve, dies, and Nicaragua balks at continuing to pay the annuity to the reserve government. Financier Frederick M. Kelley commissions a private survey of Panama for a canal.

For one year beginning in October 1864, Postmaster R.F. Perkins of San Francisco allows the U.S. mail to travel via Nicaragua.

In May 1865, the Central American Transit Company steamer *Golden Rule* wrecks on a reef out of Jamaica. By fall, new president William H. Webb is unsuccessful in raising new funds, but Webb forms the **North American Steamship Company** to raise funds to buy the ships. As of May 1866, the Central American Transit Company is only a land conveyor.

In summer 1865, Capt. **G.C.F. West** of the U.S.

Coast Survey Department recommends building a harbor at Monkey Point, transferring passengers south along the coast and then up the Rio Colorado distributary to a second transferring to Rio San Juan steamers. In October, a hurricane destroys the region from Monkey Point to north of Bluefields.

In 1865, failing to attract British investors, Bedford Pim returns to Nicaragua to secure amendments to his concession.

In 1866, Pim forms the Nicaragua Railway Company, but British investors disappoint him again.

To journey to New York City, writer Mark Twain travels from San Francisco on the *America*, departing December 15, 1866, and arriving at San Juan del Sur on or about December 29.

In February 1867, Pim discusses his plans with Webb and secures an agreement to build a road, which he cuts 111 miles from Lake Nicaragua to the Caribbean, but Webb changes his mind. Pim transfers his concession to Francis Morris who forms the

New Jersey and Pacific Transportation and Nicaragua Railway Company.

In 1867, the U.S. Congress authorizes a survey of Panama, which begins in 1869.

In 1867, with the Rio San Juan and Greytown harbor silting badly, the Central American Transit Company becomes interested in Bedford Pim's plan to build a railroad on his land grant from Monkey Point to Lake Nicaragua, but the company opts to dredge at San Juan del Norte after securing an informal agreement of amendments from Antonio Silva, minister of public improvements. Nicaragua repudiates the Silva agreements, and on August 30, 1867, it grants a canal concession to a German company of Maximilian Sonnenstern.

In 1867, the Dickinson-Ayon Treaty grants the United States transit privileges across Nicaragua, but Nicaragua maintains sovereignty over any route.

On April 18, 1868, the **Central American Transit Company** forfeits its contract, and the last transits are completed with the April sailings.

In fall 1868, C. Spaid and later Wells, Fargo operate by stage coach, and by railroad where possible, between the diminishing gap in the two U.S. transcontinental railroad lines under construction.

Plans for a Nicaragua canal

1869 - 1885

On May 10, 1869, the U.S. transcontinental railroad opens. On November 17, the Suez Canal opens.

In 1870, Nicaragua awards a 25-year concession to operate steamboats on the Rio San Juan to American **John E. Hollenbeck**, who owns the river service until he sells it in 1877.

In 1870, the U.S. Congress votes funds for surveys of the Tehuantepec route and the Nicaragua route.

In 1872, President Ulysses S. Grant appoints an **Interoceanic Canal Commission** of Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys, U.S. Army, chief of engineers; Capt. Carlile P. Patterson, superintendent of the United States Coast Survey; and Adm. **Daniel Ammen**, U.S. Navy, chief of the bureau of navigation, to report upon the subject of interoceanic ship canal communication.

Ammen investigates eight potential routes: Tehuantepec, Nicaragua, Panama, San Blas, Caledonia-Tuyra, Atrato-Tuyra, Atrato-Turando and Atrato-Napipi. U.S. Navy officers conduct the surveys: in Tehuantepec, Captain Robert W. Shufeldt; in Nicaragua, Commander Chester Hatfield, Commander Edward P. Lull and Chief Civil Engineer Aniceto G. Menocal; on the rail-



Figure 61. Cover²¹ endorsed "Oct. 12 1865" to Lee, New Hampshire, prepaid 3¢ and given to the Central American Transit Company **Moses Taylor** and marked with its oval and taken to San Juan del Sur. From Greytown on Central American Transit *Ericsson* to New York City November 22 and canceled N. YORK / STEAMSHIP. Marked Due 7 for the 10¢ over-the-Rockies rate.

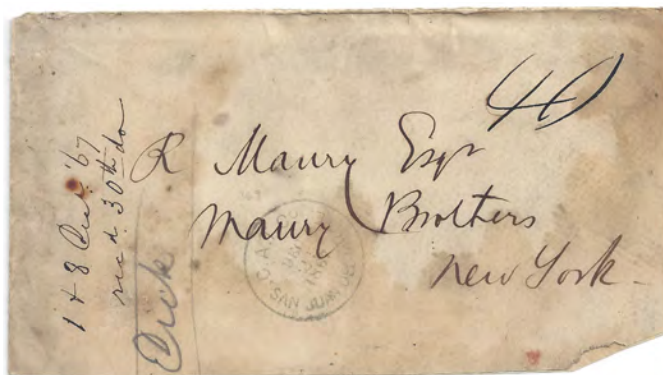
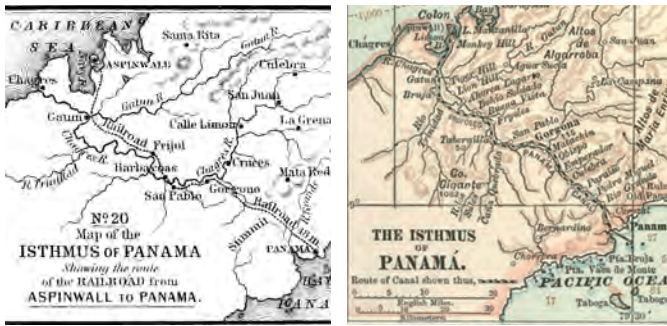


Figure 62. Folded letter Greytown December 1867 to New York City marked C.A.T. Co. / SAN JUAN DEL NORTE / DEC / 21 / 1867.



Map 3. Map 4. Both maps locate the old Caribbean port Chagres and the new port Aspinwall (Colón). At Gatun, both the Panama Railroad (1855) and the Panama Canal (1914) turn north to Aspinwall (Colón), where the town was constructed 1850-1852.

road line in Panama, Lull and Menocal; in the Darien, Commander Thomas Oliver Selfridge; and Lieutenant Frederick Collins in the Atrato and Napipi valleys of Colombia. The U.S. Navy explores and surveys the Nicaragua route in 1872-1873, beginning in April 1872.

A report written by **Edward P. Lull** and **Aniceto G. Menocal** is presented Jan 31, 1874, and favors the Nicaragua route. On February 9, 1874, the Interoceanic Canal Commission recommends the Nicaragua route. Also in 1872, U.S. diplomacy squelches talk of a trans-Nicaragua railroad from Monkey Point to Corinto. The commission report of February 7, 1876, recommends the Nicaragua route from San Juan del Norte via the Rio San Juan, Lake Nicaragua, the Rio del Medio and the Rio Grande to the Pacific port of Brito.

In May 1877, **Francisco Alfredo Pellas**, an Italian immigrant, buys the Hollenbeck river concession. Fostering his business are shipments of nonperishable coffee through Greytown, the banana trade, and renewed talk of a canal. In 1877 by the Agrarian Law, Indian lands in Nicaragua are taken for coffee cultivation.

In 1878, Nicaragua and Britain agree to arbitrate their dispute over the treaty of 1860. In 1881, Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph as arbitrator decides that Nicaragua must continue to pay the annuity and that Mosquito authorities will have nearly complete autonomy, including control of concessions for acquiring the region's products, thereby increasing British and other foreign influence.

Nicaragua issues its first interior postal card in December 1878. Usage of the card is infrequent until the 1882-1884 openings of the Western Division sections of the Ferrocarril del Pacifico de Nicaragua railway to Chinandega (March 1882), Leon (November 1882) and Momotombo (January 1884).

On May 15, 1879, the **International Scientific Congress** convenes in Paris. This commission, with

Ferdinand de Lesseps presiding, chooses to build a canal in Panama rather than in Nicaragua.

In May 1880, Aniceto G. Menocal and Commander Edward P. Lull of the **Provisional Interoceanic Canal Society** sign a contract with Nicaragua and then change the name of the society to the **Maritime Canal Company of Nicaragua**.

The French begin work on the Panamanian canal in 1881. In 1882, from a New York firm, Pellas orders a new steamboat for Lake Nicaragua, the steamer *Victoria*. On December 31, 1883, the western section of the Nicaragua Pacific Railway, with construction begun in 1880, is open from Corinto to Momotombo, and to Managua via lake steamer.

In 1884, the investment banking business of Ulysses S. Grant, attempting to raise money for the canal, goes bankrupt, and the concession of the Maritime Canal Company of Nicaragua expires.

On December 1, 1884, the Frelinghuysen-Zavala Treaty is signed in Washington. The United States is to build a canal in Nicaragua on a 2½-mile-wide strip of land, with the United States to control a joint board of directors. The treaty fails to be ratified.

In 1884, Nicaragua issues its first exterior postal cards, including a message-reply card, and its first domestic message-reply card (December 1884).

Maritime Canal Company of Nicaragua

1886 - 1893

On March 1, 1886, the eastern section of the Nicaragua Pacific Railway is open from Managua to Granada and Lake Nicaragua.

In 1886, the **Nicaragua Canal Association** of James Roosevelt and **Hiram Hitchcock** is organized with a canal concession from Nicaragua.

In 1887, Menocal, Ammen and others (Charles P. Daily, **Hiram Hitchcock**, A.B. Cornell, James Roosevelt) secure another concession from Nicaragua (the Cardenas-Menocal contract of April 24, 1887).

On December 9, 1887, the first American canal surveying party personnel arrive in Greytown, including Robert E. Peary as chief engineer. Nearly two years are spent dredging San Juan harbor, building a railroad to bring stone for a jetty, setting a telegraph line, and clearing a canal route.

On July 31, 1888, the Zeledon-Menocal contract is signed with Costa Rica, but after negotiations it is eventually suspended for two years.

In 1888, the French canal company declares bankruptcy. On December 29-30, a minor earth-

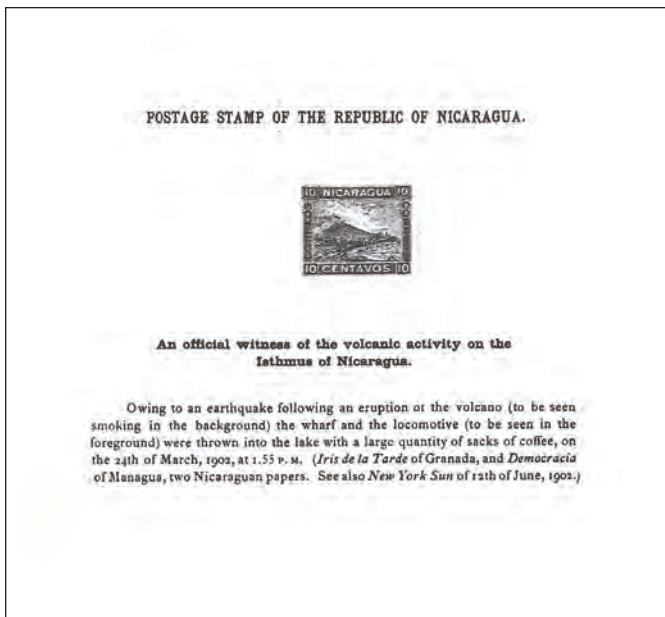


Figure 64. Example of a printed circular Philippe Bunau-Varilla had delivered June 24, 1902, along with his Panama Canal propaganda pamphlet to each member of the U.S. House. This example is in the Bunau-Varilla papers at the Library of Congress.

In 1901, **Philippe Bunau-Varilla**, a major stockholder in the French canal company and an engineer in Panama, lectures and pamphleteers in the United States for the selection of Panama as the canal site. In November, Hay and Paunceforte sign another treaty that incorporates Senate changes, and the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty is superseded. The Hay-Paunceforte Treaty is proclaimed in February 1902.

In January 1902, the U.S. House of Representatives passes a Nicaragua canal bill. In the Senate, Panama enthusiasts offer an amendment to purchase the French company's rights and to secure permission of Colombia for a canal in Panama.

In January 1902, the French canal company offers to sell out for \$40 million. The Isthmian Canal Commission revises its decision and recommends that the canal be built in Panama. In early May, Mount Pelee erupts on Martinique. A minor eruption of Mount Momotombo causes an earthquake that destroys the railroad dock at the village of Momotombo.

On June 16, 1902, Bunau-Varilla has his propaganda pamphlet and a **typed circular (Figure 63)** bearing a Momotombo stamp delivered to each member of the U.S. Senate. The Senate votes June 19 for the pro-Panama Spooner amendment 67 to 6.

On June 24, 1902, Bunau-Varilla has his pamphlet and a **printed circular (Figure 64)** bearing a Momotombo stamp delivered to each member of the House

of Representatives. The House approves the Spooner amendment 260 to 8. Various Momotombo stamps are used, not only 1-centavo stamps, as some sources wrongly state.

On June 28, 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt signs the Spooner Act into law. It calls for Panama to be the site of a U.S.-constructed canal (**Map 4**). Nicaragua is the contingent choice. The formal opening of the canal occurs August 15, 1914.

Endnotes

¹ Most of the images pictured in this article are courtesy of the online archive of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries. Other images are courtesy of the following:

Jim Baird: Figure 2

Jean Pierre Amselle: Figures 3, 4, 5, and 9

Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions: Figures 6 and 52

Gordon Eubanks: Figures 13 and 15

Rick Mingee: Figure 14

Spink USA / Spink Shreves: Figures 24, 26, 35, 46, 51, and 61

Ebay: Figure 30

Ken Stach: Figures 47 and 59

Rupp Brothers: Figure 49

Richard Frajola: Figure 60

William G. Byerley: Figure 62

Library of Congress: Figures 63 and 64

² The first U.S. contract mail from San Francisco left March 19, 1849, on the Peruvian bark *Callao*, hired by William Van Voorhies, U.S. special post office agent for California and Oregon.

³ Eastbound sailing tables via Panama are in Walske and Frajola, *Mails of the Westward Expansion*, Appendix C. Its Chapter 6 discusses mail sent via Panama 1848-1861.

⁴ Before March 1849, mail within Alta California 1821-1846 was carried by the Mexican post office. Stephen W. Kearny's California regional mail service provided a military courier service and carried private letters from San Francisco to San Diego from April 19, 1847, to August 11, 1848, after which the route covered only San Francisco to Monterey. Other mails to or from California developed via Cape Horn to 1835, via Vera Cruz and Mazatlan, Mexico, 1824-1846, via Panama 1846-1849, via overland by military courier 1846-1848, by private courier in 1848 carrying gold overland or by ship, and in 1848 by couriers hired by San Francisco merchants and newspapers. See Walske and Frajola, *Mails of the Westward Expansion*, Chapter 4.

Before 1849, mail to or from the Oregon territory (Oregon Country to the Americans and Columbia District to the British) was carried via Cape Horn or Hawaii or overland by fur traders and missionaries traveling to the Columbia River (Fort Astoria and Fort Vancouver), via the Platte and Sweetwater rivers and via South and Teton passes to Fort Hall and the Snake and Columbia rivers, via Hawaii and forwarded by ship to Mazatlan and to Vera Cruz, via overland and water by the Hudson Bay Company annual expresses to its factories on Hudson Bay (York Factory and Moose Factory) and at Lachine (on the Island of Montreal), and via overland by travelers arriving at or departing from Missouri locations. See

Walske and Frajola, *Mails of the Westward Expansion*, Chapter 3.

For a discussion of early private mail, 1841-1849, from Santa Fe, Taos, and Bent's Fort, see Walske and Frajola, *Mails of the Westward Expansion*, Chapter 2.

Mormon travelers 1847-1848 carried mail between Salt Lake City and locations in Missouri, Iowa and Nebraska. The U.S. post office in Salt Lake City was established January 18, 1849. Almon Babbitt established a service under a special contract that carried mail 1849-1850 from Salt Lake City to Kanesville, Iowa. J.M. Estill & Company carried mail privately on one round trip between Pacific Springs (in Wyoming near South Pass) and Westport, Missouri. Travelers and military couriers carried mail May 1848 between Fort Kearney and Fort Leavenworth. Mail between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Francisco from August 1847 to April 1851 was carried according to separate trip contracts negotiated by the Salt Lake City postmaster. U.S. postal contract routes were established from Salt Lake City to Missouri (August 1850) and to California (May 1851). See Walske and Frajola, *Mails of the Westward Expansion*, Chapter 5.

⁵ Map 1 is a section of a map of Central America in *The Century Atlas*, copyright 1897 by The Century Company of New York City. Its scale is 70 miles per inch, but it is pictured here at 81 percent of actual size. The proposed canal identified on the map by a thick black-and-white line from La Virgen to Brito was never built. Large red dots indicate volcanic activity in the 19th century. Map 2 shows the river route from Greytown (San Juan del Norte).

⁶ Richard Frajola, *California Private Mails, 1849 to 1856*, no date [2012], 107 pages, at rfracjola.com in the Exhibits section.

⁷ Map 2 is a section of another map in *The Century Atlas*. Its scale is 35 miles per inch, but it is pictured here at 120 percent of actual size. The proposed canal identified on the map by a thick black-and-white line from Greytown to Ochoa was never built.

⁸ The small borderless VIA. NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS marking in blue (also red) is among the earliest of the Via Nicaragua markings. Its origin and its user or users are not known. Its slogan was used in advertisements placed by the Accessory Transit Company, so the marking is believed to have originated with the company and to have been used by its agent in San Francisco, possibly by a San Francisco letter-bag operator working in conjunction with the Accessory Transit Company, or by both. Letter-bag operators were businesses in San Francisco (usually newsrooms and stationers) that tracked ship sailings and displayed sailing schedules and collected mail from customers and routed it by the fastest opportunity to a non-contract ship or to the post office and a contract ship. The mail was collected in a bag at the operator's office or at a private mail box nearby or in the city. Mail that a customer deposited directly with the San Francisco post office would automatically go by the contract steamship via Panama, even if a non-contract steamship was departing days or weeks earlier.

⁹ Figure 12. The back bears a blue oval handstamp reading "Supplied from / J.W. Sullivan's Newspaper Office / Next Door to the Post Office / Kearney St. San Francisco."

¹⁰ Acceptance of bisects ended in the East after distribution of a notice to postmasters dated September 12, 1853, from the first assistant postmaster general. San Francisco stopped accepting most bisects by late October. The postmaster general's circular of November

10, 1853, noted that bisects were not authorized to prepay postage.

¹¹ Figure 37. Pencil annotation "March 1854." From Greytown by *Northern Light* March 17 to New York City March 25. See Walske-Frajola, Appendix E, and Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, 1987 Rarities of the World, sale No. 679, lot No. 117.

¹² Figure 38. Cover to South Dartmouth, Mass. The unclear March postmark might also fit arrival at New York City in 1854, from San Francisco on *Brother Jonathan* February 16 to San Juan del Sur March 1 and from Greytown on *Star of the West* March 5 and arrival at New York City March 14. See Walske and Frajola, *Mails of the Westward Expansion*, Appendix E, page 296.

¹³ Figure 43. Cover to Buckland, Mass. The July 12 postmark also could fit the 1853 unspecified but assumed departure of an Accessory Transit Company steamer from San Francisco in mid-June 1853. See Walske and Frajola, *Mails of the Westward Expansion*, Appendix E, page 295.

¹⁴ Figure 44. Cover to Keene, N.H. The June 9 postmark also fits arrival June 9, 1853, in New York City, from San Francisco on *Sierra Nevada* May 16 to San Juan del Sur and from Greytown on *Prometheus* May 31, 1853. See Walske and Frajola, *Mails of the Westward Expansion*, Appendix E, page 295.

¹⁵ Figure 46. Cover to Chicago, Ill. The March 4 postmark also fits arrival March 3, 1853, in New York City, from San Francisco on *Pacific* January 31 to San Juan del Sur and from Greytown on *Star of the West* February 20, with entry into the U.S. mails March 4, 1853. See Walske and Frajola, *Mails of the Westward Expansion*, Appendix E, page 295.

¹⁶ Figure 48. Cover to Brunswick, Maine. The January 9 postmark also fits arrival January 9, 1853, in New York City, from San Francisco on *Pacific* December 15, 1852, to San Juan del Sur December 27 and from Greytown by *Northern Light* January 1, 1853, but December 1852 is too early for the marking. See Walske and Frajola, *Mails of the Westward Expansion*, Appendix E, page 294.

¹⁷ Figure 50. Cover docketed January 15, 1854. By *Sierra Nevada* San Francisco January 16 to San Juan del Sur January 28. By *Star of the West* Greytown January 31 to New York City February 9.

¹⁸ Figure 51. Cover to Boston, Massachusetts. The January 9 postmark also fits arrival January 9, 1853, in New York City, from San Francisco on *Pacific* December 15, 1852, to San Juan del Sur December 27 and from Greytown by *Northern Light* January 1, 1853, but December 1852 is too early for the marking. See Walske and Frajola, *Mails of the Westward Expansion*, Appendix E, page 294.

¹⁹ Figure 55. Cover to Cincinnati. The Siegel firm notes: "stamps lifted and hinged in place to better see the express markings, small cosmetic improvements," and Ashbrook notes, "This cover may have gone by an independent line via Panama but it is more than probable it was the Nicaragua route." (Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, 2013, sale No. 1041, lot No. 346).

²⁰ Figure 58. Richard Frajola believes that this cover went via Panama in 1857, not via Nicaragua in 1856 (from San Francisco circa January 21 by Accessory Transit steamship *Sierra Nevada* and from Greytown by its *Northern Light* to New York City February 13).

²¹ Figure 61. Cover 1865. The Central American Transit Company purchased the *Moses Taylor* and the *America* in July 1864 from the People's Opposition Steamship Line and operated them on the Pacific. Its *Santiago de Cuba* and *Ericsson* operated on the Atlantic. ■

The handstamped Nicaragua route markings of 1853-1856 and the markings of the San Francisco letter bag operators

Michael Schreiber

The earliest travelers through Nicaragua to San Francisco and the California gold fields in 1849 used a route via the Rio San Juan to Fort San Carlos and Lake Nicaragua, then via the lake to Granada and by land to the old colonial port Realejo. The first map below shows the section of the route across the lake to Granada and by land to Realejo.

In 1849, there were no scheduled ships calling at Realejo, and the wait for one traveling to San Francisco could last for weeks or months. Most early travelers crossing the Central American isthmus to California did not journey via Nicaragua. They went



Transit route across Nicaragua, February 1849 - June 1851.
This map does not show most of the Rio San Juan.



Transit route across Nicaragua, July 1851 - April 1857.



Figure 1. Two private markings on a folded letter sent via Panama from San Francisco, dateline May 12, 1851, to New York City to the firm Howland and Aspinwall. The cover traveled entirely outside the U.S. mails. The markings promote Gregory's Atlantic and Pacific Express service and the New York forwarding service of Thompson and Hitchcock. Regular sailings on the Nicaragua route of Cornelius Vanderbilt's Accessory Transit Company did not begin until July 14.

via Panama on regularly scheduled steamships.¹

The new route via Nicaragua that opened in July 1851 provided the significant advantage of a shorter distance than the Panama route along with a schedule of regular sailings. The second map, left, shows the new route up the Rio San Juan and across the lake to La Virgen and by land to San Juan del Sur.

The new Nicaragua route operated until the Filibuster War interrupted it in February 1856 and eventually shut it down in December 1856 and January 1857. The war, against usurper William Walker, lasted from June 1855 through April 1857.

Figure 1 pictures two markings struck on a folded letter sent in May 1851 from San Francisco to New York City. The letter traveled via Panama entirely outside the United States mails. The cover (pictured on page 5) bears private markings of Gregory's Atlantic and Pacific Express, the red marking applied in San Francisco and the blue applied in New York City.

On July 14, 1851, the Accessory Transit Company of Cornelius Vanderbilt and other investors inaugurated the competing route via Nicaragua, with sailings that day from both San Francisco and New York City. Nicaragua had ratified the contract for the route on September 20, 1849.²

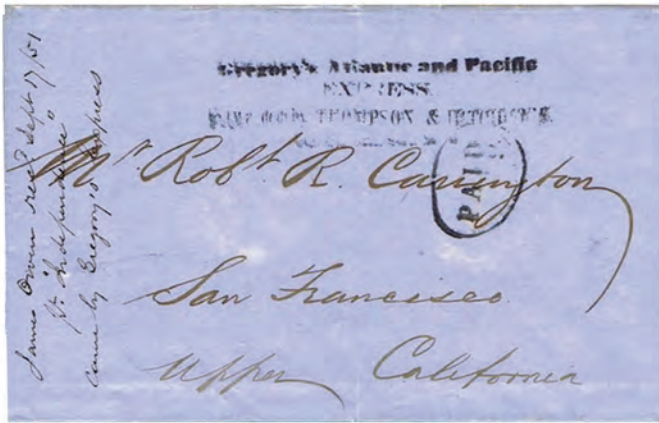


Figure 2. Gregory's private marking on a folded letter sent from New York City datelined August 14, 1851. This cover also traveled entirely outside the U.S. mails, but it went via Nicaragua, not Panama. The cover is docketed "per 'Independence,'" an Accessory Transit Company steamer plying between San Juan del Sur and San Francisco.

Figure 2 pictures a folded letter sent to San Francisco from New York City that also was transported by Gregory's Express, but this time via Nicaragua. The cover, datelined August 14, 1851, is docketed (probably by the recipient) as arriving September 17, 1851, per steamer *Independence*, an Accessory Transit ship plying the Pacific to San Juan del Sur.³

The markings of Gregory's Atlantic and Pacific Express are recorded used in 1851-1852. Beginning in 1853, other markings that include the specific phrase "Via Nicaragua" came into use. By early 1853, the Nicaragua route had become an impressive competitor to the Panama route, carrying hundreds of passengers per month as well as freight and mail. The Nicaragua route markings originated during the surge in the route's popularity.

Collectors of 19th-century U.S. postal history prize covers bearing Via Nicaragua route markings, especially collectors of the Western mails and collectors of covers bearing stamps of the 1851-1857 issue.

Most collectors of Nicaragua postal history ignore the Nicaragua route covers and markings because they precede Nicaragua's first adhesive stamps, issued in 1862, or because, for the most part, the covers do not bear markings that were struck in Nicaragua.

Who applied the Via Nicaragua markings to mail sent from San Francisco and New York City during 1853-1856? When and where did they apply the markings? Why did they apply the markings?

Answers to these questions and some tentative answers (hypotheses) emerge by studying and comparing the covers that bear the markings.

Figure 3 pictures an example of the earliest type of Via Nicaragua marking. It reads in two lines "VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS."

This marking is believed to have been applied to mailpieces at the San Francisco wharf by the agent of the Accessory Transit Company. The function of the marking was promotional, to advertise the route.

The cover was carried by ship privately from San Francisco via Nicaragua, rather than via the U.S. post office and a ship operating under a U.S. mail contract via the Panama route.

This example of the marking is struck on a cover sent onward from New York City on June 24 [1853]. Page 7

pictures the cover. Based on confirmed 1853 year dates for other mailpieces bearing the marking, and based on published tables of sailing dates

for the Nicaragua route, the cover bearing the Figure 3 marking left San Francisco June 1, 1853, and the "VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS." marking was struck that day or some day prior.⁴

Because the Accessory Transit Company was the only firm transporting mail across Nicaragua, it is logical to assume that the company's wharf agent in San Francisco applied the English-language marking to the cover. It is not known for certain, however, who or what office applied the marking.

To better understand the Nicaragua route markings, it is useful to examine the few covers that bear two such markings. Why do these covers bear two markings when most Nicaragua route covers bear one? The three covers pictured, respectively, in Figure 4, Figure 5 and Figure 6 bear interesting combinations of markings.

The Figure 4 cover to Vermont was sent at the 6¢ rate for a prepaid transcontinental letter, a rate in effect July 1, 1851, through March 31, 1855. The cover bears a "VIA . NICARAGUA / NOISY CARRIERS / PUBLISHING HALL" marking in blue (appears greenish on the buff envelope) with the lettering reversed out of the design. It also bears a red "VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS" octagonal marking, a horizontal box with chamfered corners.

The blue marking is rare, whether it is considered

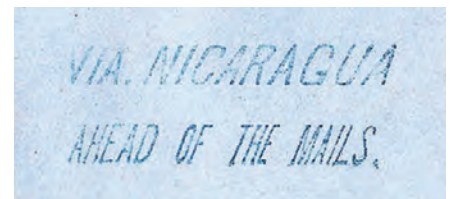


Figure 3. Two-line marking applied in San Francisco in 1853 on or before June 1 on an envelope sent to Bangor, Maine.



Figure 4. Cover circa 1853-1854 bearing a marking or imprint of San Francisco letter bag operator Noisy Carriers, sent to the East via the Nicaragua steamship route, not the route via Panama.

to be a marking added after mailing or an imprint added to a blank envelope prior to mailing.

Noisy Carriers Publishing Hall was a publisher, book seller, stationer, newsroom, and letter bag operator located on San Francisco's Long Wharf (previously called Central Wharf, later called Commercial Street Wharf). Charles P. Kimball (1821-1894) opened the business in 1850 in what was a one-room store.⁵

As a young newspaper crier, Kimball had written news jingles and cried them to attract customers, and his nickname became the name of his business, Noisy Carriers (or Carrier's) Publishing Hall.⁶

The San Francisco letter bag operators usually operated as newsrooms or stationers. The letter bag operators tracked ship sailings and schedules, and they collected mail from customers and routed it by the fastest opportunity via a non-contract ship or via the post office and a contract ship.

The mail was collected in a bag at the letter bag operator's office or at a private mail box in the city. Service through an unattended private mail box implies that a mailer could deposit mail without paying a fee to the operator of the box. Kimball records how customers in February 1850 deposited mail in his city boxes without paying his fee.⁷

Others who operated letter bags during the period of the Via Nicaragua markings are George H. Leland and John W. Sullivan (as of May 1852 and separately by mid 1853), and Lecount & Strong (June 1853).

From March 1849 through mid-January 1860, mail deposited at the San Francisco post office would automatically go by a U.S. mail contract steamship via Panama, even if a non-contract steamship was departing days or weeks earlier. The letter bag opera-

tors knew when sending mail by the non-contract Nicaragua route would be advantageous.

The blue "VIA . NICARAGUA / NOISY CARRIERS / PUBLISHING HALL" marking was applied to the Figure 4 cover by Noisy Carriers as the operator of a letter bag, but it is not known when the marking was applied. As noted in a previous paragraph, the marking could have been applied to a blank envelope, making the envelope ready for sale in the shop and almost ready for mailing. If that is how the marking might have functioned, such envelopes also could have been sold with stamps affixed.

The blue marking serves two functions: it is directional, stating the expected routing for the mailpiece, and it is promotional, naming the route and the business that provided the envelope or that handled the mailpiece in San Francisco or that did both.

The presence of the blue Noisy Carriers marking or imprint strongly implies that the red "VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS" marking on the Figure 4 cover was not applied by Noisy Carriers. For this second Via Nicaragua marking, as with the Figure 3 marking, the hypothesis is that it was applied at the San Francisco wharf by the agent of the Accessory Transit Company, either in the company office or perhaps at the wharf in the open air.

Accessory Transit Company was the operator of non-contract steamships to and from Nicaragua and of the land, lake, and river route across Nicaragua via San Juan del Norte (Greytown), San Carlos, La Virgen (Virgin Bay), and San Juan del Sur.

Accessory Transit Company was created August 14, 1851, when Nicaragua's conservative government granted to Joseph L. White, a partner of Cornelius Vanderbilt, a modification of the treaty that on March 9, 1850, had granted a canal company charter to the American Atlantic and Pacific Ship Canal Company. The treaty of March 9, 1850, had incorporated the ship canal company in Nicaragua.

Vanderbilt, White, Daniel B. Allen, and others created the ship canal company with the goal of building a canal across Nicaragua, but the demand for passage to the California gold region and for freight service both westbound (for goods) and eastbound (for gold dust and ore) put the canal scheme on hold. The 1851 treaty modification created the Accessory Transit Company as a separate entity to operate the Nicaragua transit route.

Vanderbilt was the named Accessory Transit Company agent in New York City, and Vanderbilt



Figure 5. Cover October 14, 1854, from San Francisco deposited with San Francisco letter bag operator Noisy Carriers Publishing Hall and sent from San Francisco on the steamship *Sierra Nevada*.

son-in-law James M. Cross was the named Accessory Transit Company agent in San Francisco as of January 1852. Vanderbilt's brother Jacob Vanderbilt went to Nicaragua in February 1852 as supervisor of the Accessory Transit Company.

Cornelius K. Garrison, a Panamanian banker and merchant and a former Mississippi steamboat captain, left New York to become Vanderbilt's new agent in San Francisco, arriving March 23, 1853. It is possible that the introduction of the Nicaragua route markings in San Francisco in spring 1853 could have originated with Garrison's assumption of the management of the agency there. As a former Mississippi steamboat captain, he would have been familiar with the name-of-boat and other private markings applied to mail along the river. More study of Garrison is needed.⁸

The hypothesized handling of the Figure 4 cover would be from letter bag operator to steamship agent to steamship. Runners could have carried the letter and other letters from point to point in minutes. The letter bag operator and the agent were located in offices close to or on the wharf, and either could have had a clerk working on the wharf in the open air.

The Figure 4 cover to Vermont never entered the U.S. mails as a loose letter. It likely was sent from the port of entry to Vermont inside another envelope. The port of entry is not known. It could be New York City, but the cover does not bear a New York City arrival postmark or a cancel usually struck on Nicaragua-route covers that entered the U.S. mails there.

The cover shown in Figure 5, in contrast, did enter the U.S. mails at New York City. The cover was sent onward from New York City November 14, the date of the postmark. This is the same day that Accessory Transit Company steamship *Northern Light* arrived at New York City. The cover departed San

Francisco October 24, 1854, on the Accessory Transit Company steamship *Sierra Nevada*. In the published tables, no November dates in any other year, 1853, 1855-1856, fit.⁹

The combination markings on the Figure 5 cover are a blue capped rectangle reading "FORWARDED / VIA / NICARAGUA / FROM / NOISY CARRIERS PUBLISHING HALL / SAN FRANCISCO" and a lightly struck blue oval reading "STMR. SIERRA NEVADA / VIA NICARAGUA / ADVANCE OF THE MAILS."

The Noisy Carriers marking was applied to the Figure 5 cover by Noisy Carriers Publishing Hall as the operator of a letter bag. The marking serves the same directional and promotional functions as the Noisy Carriers marking on the Figure 4 cover.

The oval "STMR. SIERRA NEVADA / VIA NICARAGUA / ADVANCE OF THE MAILS." marking is a puzzle. Its "VIA NICARAGUA / ADVANCE OF THE MAILS." text states the broad mission and slogan of the Accessory Transit Company, which suggests a marking applied in the office of the agent rather than by someone on the steamship, a ship owned primarily by Garrison. But its "STMR. SIERRA NEVADA" text names the specific ship, which suggests a marking possibly applied on board the ship or at the dock, but not necessarily on board the ship or at the dock.

The hypothesized handling of the Figure 5 cover would be from mailer to letter bag operator to steamship, or from mailer to letter bag operator to steamship agent and then to the steamship, with the "STMR. SIERRA NEVADA / VIA NICARAGUA / ADVANCE OF THE MAILS." marking applied either in the office of the agent, at the dock, or on board the steamship.

The cover from San Francisco shown in Figure 6 bears a black "STMR. SIERRA NEVADA / VIA NICA-



Figure 6. Folded letter March 1854 from San Francisco given to a San Francisco letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent and sent on the steamship *Sierra Nevada*.



Figure 7. Cover circa 1853 - March 1855 from San Francisco. On the back (not shown) is a blue oval handstamp reading: "SUPPLIED FROM / J.W. SULLIVAN'S / NEWSPAPER OFFICE, / NEXT DOOR TO THE POST OFFICE / KEARNEY ST. SAN FRANCISCO."



Figure 8. This "SUPPLIED FROM / J.W. SULLIVAN'S NEWSPAPER OFFICE" oval, struck on an illustrated lettersheet sold by Sullivan, is the same as the marking struck on the back of the Figure 7 cover.

RAGUA / ADVANCE OF THE MAIL." oval marking and a black "VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAIL." chamfered box marking. This folded letter, annotated "March 1854," left San Francisco March 1, 1854, on the *Sierra Nevada*. It left San Juan del Norte (Greytown) March 17 on the *Northern Light*, and it arrived March 25 at New York City from where it would have been sent onward that day or the next. It was marked "SHIP" upon arrival in New York City.

Using the same hypothesis formulated for the Figure 4 cover, the "VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAIL." chamfered box marking on the Figure 6 cover would have been applied at the San Francisco wharf by the agent of the Accessory Transit Company, either in the office or perhaps in the open air.

The "STMR. SIERRA NEVADA / VIA NICARAGUA / ADVANCE OF THE MAIL." oval marking would have been applied either in the office of the same agent or possibly at the dock or on board the ship.

The phrases "ahead of the mails" and "advance of the mails" were slogans that the Accessory Transit Company used in newspaper advertising. The Via Nicaragua directional markings promoted correct sorting and bagging or bundling at the office of the agent and directed the mailpieces to an Accessory Transit steamship, not to the U.S. post office in San Francisco.

Why was there a specific Nicaragua route marking that names the *Sierra Nevada*? This could have been a Garrison project, perhaps an experiment for one ship that would not be repeated if he had realized that it meant a clerk would have to apply the correct ship marking each time, a step subject to human error. The *Sierra Nevada* marking deserves more study.

Other transisthmian markings that name ships are the combined Uncle Sam / North Star marking and the combined Yankee Blade / North Star marking. Each was used to apply a directional and promotional message on mailpieces sent via Vanderbilt's Independent opposition line (competitive line) via Panama. There also is the oval S.S. Moses Taylor marking used in at least 1865 by the Central American Transit Company. It is not known where these markings were applied. In the office of the respective agent, at the wharf, and on board are all possibilities.

Figure 7 pictures a cover marked with a black "VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAIL." chamfered box. Its stamps were cancelled "STEAM / SHIP" in New York City. What is interesting about this cover is that the reverse (not shown) bears a blue oval handstamp reading "SUPPLIED FROM / J.W. SULLIVAN'S / NEWSPAPER OFFICE, / NEXT DOOR TO THE POST OFFICE / KEARNEY ST. SAN FRANCISCO." Figure 8 pictures the same marking struck in black on a lettersheet sold as writing paper.

The reason for the oval Sullivan marking on the Figure 7 cover is that it states the name of the supplier and seller of the envelope. Who conveyed this cover to the Accessory Transit Company agent or to the dock is not known. It could have been Sullivan.

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The various Via Nicaragua markings were used beginning in May 1853 and mostly through 1854, with fewer examples in 1855 and later. Wines & Co. markings are known from 1855 and 1856, often with an accompanying Granada oval. No Via Nicaragua markings are documented used prior to May 1853.

Based on the published sailing tables, many if not most Via Nicaragua covers can be year-dated if they bear a clear New York month and day. Most

Nicaragua route covers that entered the U.S. mails at New York City were sent onward (postmarked) the day the ship arrived or the next day. Postmark dates usually match ship arrival dates or are one day after arrival, sometimes later.

Some covers cannot be dated to a specific year. Covers from California entering the U.S. mails at New York City sometimes bear a postmark date that matches or lags by a day a ship arrival date there that is the same in two different years or even three years. Having the same or similar departure and arrival dates from year to year in some months was not unusual.

Covers bearing 10 cents postage date from April 1, 1855, or later, when the letter rate from California increased to 10 cents, with prepayment compulsory.

Exceptions to the year-dating problem are covers from San Francisco bearing bisects of the 12¢ Washington stamp. Most such covers can be dated from August 1853 through late October 1853, when the San Francisco post office used bisected 12¢ stamps because of a shortage of 3¢ stamps.

The numerous Via Nicaragua markings with two lines of text in a chamfered box suggest that those devices wore out because they were cheaply made. These markings could have been made from stereo-type devices that might have been cast out of cheap metal from a lockup of set type and printer's rules or other flexible metal that could form curves. The raised, wrong-reading type and lines would produce a right-reading mold for casting a raised, wrong-reading device that could be fitted with a wooden handle. Devices also could have been carved from wood.

Letters (type) made from vulcanized rubber that were suitable for handstamping were not developed until 1864-66. The pioneering work occurred in the United States. The rubber devices also required ink that would not deteriorate the vulcanized rubber.

Ken Stach believes that the Wines straightline markings were applied with a device that tightly held individual letters but that sometimes the type loosened and moved before it was retightened.

For the Leland and Sullivan markings, type 5 and type 13a, respectively, the assumption is that each letter bag operator applied the marking that included his respective name.

Endnotes

¹ David I. Folkman Jr., *The Nicaragua Route*, University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1972. Pages 1-10 discuss the route across Nicaragua from February 1849 through June 1851.

Appendix A, "Steamship Schedules," also lists the approximate number of passengers carried on each departure from New York and from San Francisco, 1851-1857 and 1862-1868, plus New Orleans and Nicaragua, 1852-1857. Folkman lists what he believes are first- and second-class cabin passengers, not steerage passengers. Folkman's steamship schedules list dates and ship names from San Francisco eastbound and from New York westbound.

The book *Mails of the Westward Expansion, 1803 to 1861*, by Steven C. Walske and Richard C. Frajola, in Appendix E, "Via Nicaragua Sailings, 1851-1856," lists eastbound departure dates and ships from San Francisco and arrival dates and ships at New York City. It also lists arrival dates at San Juan del Sur and departure dates from San Juan del Norte.

There are some date conflicts between the Folkman sailing tables and the Walske-Frajola sailing tables. See also endnote No. 4 on the next page.

The maps on page 31 are from *The Century Atlas*, copyright 1897 by The Century Company of New York City. In the 1850s, Managua and Masaya were smaller settlements, not the cities shown on the maps. Large red dots indicate volcanic activity in the 19th century. The two maps have different scales: 70 miles per inch and 35 miles per inch in the originals. They are pictured on page 31 at approximately 78 percent and 58 percent, which shows the geographic features at the same relative size, but the sizes of the identifying text varies between the two maps.

² T.J. Stiles, *The First Tycoon: The Epic Life of Cornelius Vanderbilt*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2009. Chapters 7-12 provide a detailed and riveting account of the development and operation of the Vanderbilt route across Nicaragua and of the war with William Walker and his filibusters.

The word "filibuster" is from the Dutch "vrijbouter," meaning "freebooter" or "plunderer." In Spanish the word is "filibustero."

³ Images pictured in this article are courtesy of the following businesses or individuals:

Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries: Figures 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8; Marking 1a, blue two-line; 3b, Via nearly touches; 4a, Via not close; 5a, 5b, 5d, Via Nicaragua with Leland; 6a, 6b, 6c, 6d, 6e, 6f, two-line in chamfered box; 7a, 7b, 7c, 7d, two-line in chamfered box; 8b, 8c, two-line in chamfered box; 12a, 12b, Via Nicaragua in Advance of the Mails; 13a, Via Nicaragua in Advance of the Mails / Sullivan; 13b, Supplied From / J.W. Sullivan's / Newspaper Office, / Next Door to the Post Office / Kearney St. San Francisco.; 17, Noisy Carriers badge; 19a, Wines Express oval; section 21a, Wells, Fargo; Noisy Carriers a, three-line; Noisy Carriers b, fancy; Noisy Carriers c, oval.

Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions: Figure 4; Marking 1b, red two-line; 2, straightline in box; Vanderbilt Line cover; 5c, Via Nicaragua with LELAND; 6h, 6i, two-line in chamfered box; 8a, two-line in chamfered box; 9, chamfered box missing; 10a, 10b, Steamer Sierra Nevada oval; 11a, Nicaragua Line oval detail and cover; 14, J. Hawes and Co.'s Express; 15, Noisy Carriers negative; 16, Noisy Carriers crowned box; 21b, 21c, Wells, Fargo; Noisy Carriers d, Independent Line.

Spink USA / Spink Shreves: Marking 3a, Via nearly touches; 6g, two-line in chamfered box.

Ken Stach: Markings 18a, 18b, 18c, Wines Express straightline; 19b, Wines Express oval; 20a, 20b, Wines Granada.

Jim Baird: Figure 2, Gregory's Atlantic and Pacific Express.
 Gordon Eubanks: 11b, Nicaragua Line oval.
 William G. Byerley: Central American Transit.
 Ebay: 4b, two-line in chamfered box with Via not close.

⁴ Steven C. Walske and Richard C. Frajola, *Mails of the Westward Expansion, 1803 to 1861*, Western Cover Society, 2015. The book's Chapter 8, "Mail Via Nicaragua, 1851-1857" and Appendix E, "Via Nicaragua Sailings, 1851-1856," discuss the Nicaragua route. See endnote No. 1 for a description of the sailing tables. As of May 2015, the entire Walske-Frajola book is available as a free download at rfrajola.com/books. Also available there is an additional index of westbound sailings via Panama, from New York to Chagres or Aspinwall, and from Panama City to San Francisco.

⁵ Jesse L. Coburn, *Letters of Gold: California Postal History Through 1869*, U.S. Philatelic Classics Society Inc. and the Philatelic Foundation, 1984. Chapter 4, pages 112-116, discusses the letter-bag operators. The chapter also summarizes the route via Nicaragua and the route via Panama.

Coburn wrote (pages 113-114): "John W. (Jerry) Sullivan, who specialized in delivering newspapers all over California, also found it profitable to provide letter bags for mail sent on the Nicaragua route. For this reason he adopted the slogan of Vanderbilt's lines, 'Via Nicaragua, in Advance of the Mail' and identified his company by placing his name at the bottom of the oval handstamp. George L. Leland [sic, initial is H.], later a partner in the Leland and McCombe Express Company, copied Sullivan's practice of using the Nicaraguan slogan, only he chose to sign a rectangular handstamp using the second slogan format, 'Via Nicaragua Ahead of the Mails.' "

It is not known if the statements that Sullivan adopted the Vanderbilt slogan and that Leland copied Sullivan are facts or conjectures by Coburn. Coburn's book includes a bibliography of general and specific sources, but it has no footnotes that pinpoint sources for statements he made in his text.

⁶ Basil C. Pearce, "Charles P. Kimball, San Francisco's 'Noisy Carrier,'" *Western Express*, April 1963, Vol. 13, No. 2, pages 3-19, quotes six of Kimball's jingles, taken from Kimball's diary. The diary is part of the collection of the Society of California Pioneers, founded in 1850 and located at 101 Montgomery, Suite 150, Presidio of San Francisco. Pearce makes no mention of the markings that Kimball used on mail. The diary deserves another reading today to specifically look for possible comments on mail marking devices and mail handling.

Kimball (1821-1894) arrived in San Francisco on a schooner in July 1849, coming around Cape Horn. In October 1849, he operated an express service between Sacramento and San Francisco, carrying "Parcels, Bundles, Merchandise, Orders, &c" and business entrusted to him. In February 1850 in San Francisco, he established a city letter delivery and parcel post service, with boxes located in the city: "Letters delivered according to direction, for 12-1/2¢. Letters for the post office you will please mark P.O. and drop the money in, or write your name and place of business on the back, that you may be called on. Parcels less than 25 lbs delivered as per order deposited for a reasonable consideration." Kimball had 35 boxes made for locations throughout the city. Pearce summarizes the diary entry for February 20: "complains that his boxes are filled with letters addressed to the Eastern States and nothing deposited in the way of his charges,

he could only deposit the letters in the post office." Kimball soon learned from the San Francisco postmaster that only the postmaster could appoint someone to deliver local letters.

The diary entry for February 26, 1850, reads: "... took in 15 cents from my boxes, this is the first and all I have taken so far; and took down all my boxes." On March 12, 1850, Kimball began working as a printer's devil and "Paper Carrier selling *Daily Journal of Commerce*." He cried his first doggerel verse on March 18.

⁷ Endnote No. 6 documents how in early 1850 Kimball fell victim to mailers who used his letter boxes but did not pay his fee for delivering the letters deposited.

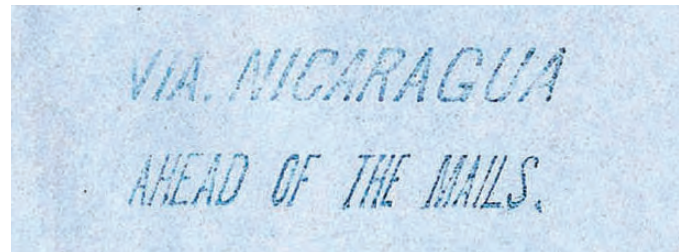
⁸ Stiles records that Garrison arrived March 23, 1853.

⁹ Walske-Frajola, pages 293-298.

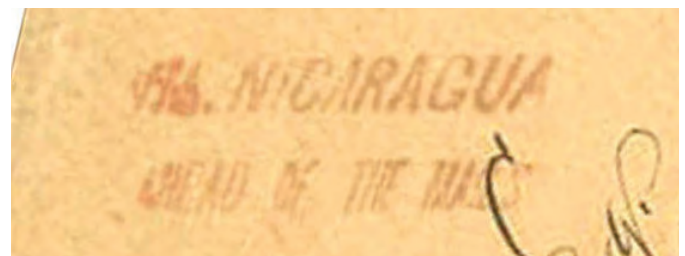
The Via Nicaragua markings

A listing of Nicaragua route markings, with the **date of departure** (San Francisco unless stated otherwise) of the cover bearing each marking pictured. Images are not shown to the same scale.

1 two-line italic



(a) blue 1853 June 1



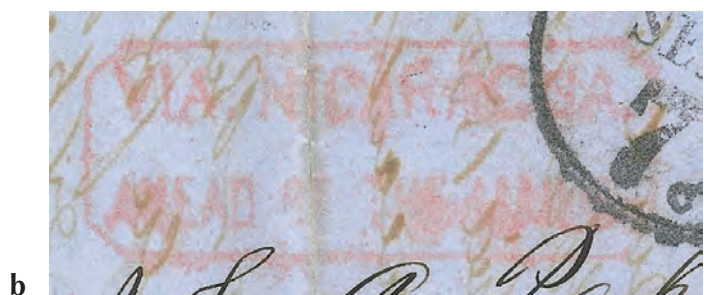
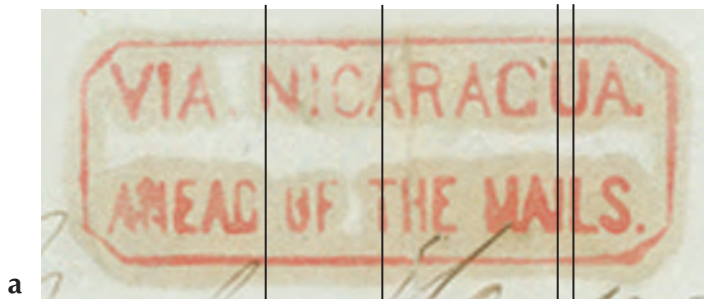
(b) red 1854 May 15

2 straightline in box



1853 October 1 or 1854 September 30

3 two-line in chamfered box VIA nearly touches corner



(a) and (b) 1853 September 1

4 two-line in chamfered box VIA not close to corner

In this marking, VIA is 3 millimeters from the corner of the box. Letters of the words appear to be aligned as in marking type 3.



(a) and (b) 1853 September 1

5 two-line in chamfered box LELAND. at lower right

In this marking, the "I" in MAILS is directly under the "U" in NICARAGUA. The "L" in "MAILS" is aligned with the right side of the "U."

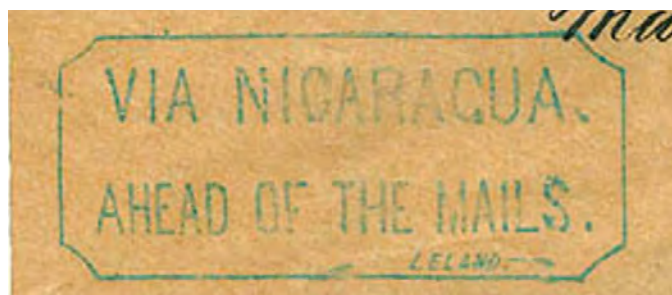
It is assumed that this marking signifies a mailpiece accepted and marked by Leland as a San Francisco letter bag operator.



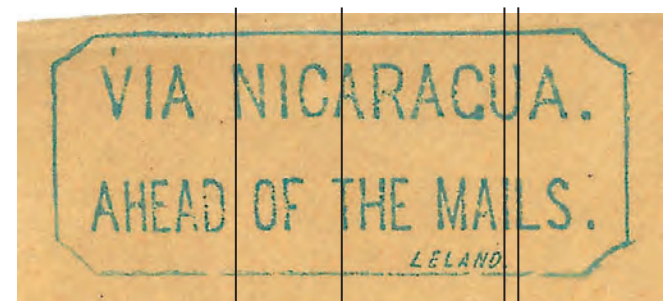
a



b



c



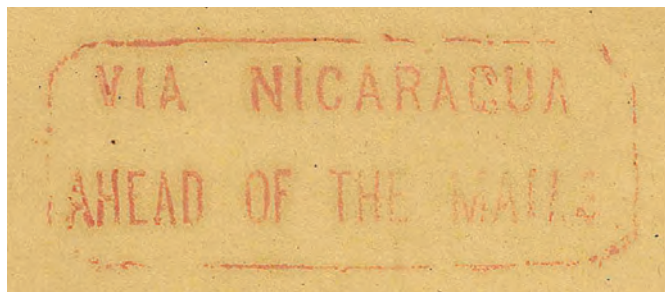
d

(a) 1853 September 16
(b) 1853 December 31
(c) 1853 August 16 or 1854 August 16
(d) 1854 November 24

6 two-line in chamfered box H directly under first A

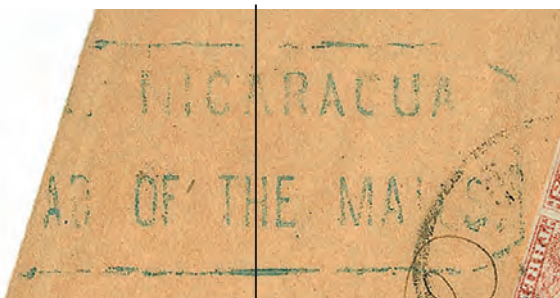
In this marking, the "H" in THE is directly under the first "A" in NICARAGUA, and the "L" in MAILS points almost to the apex of the second "A" in NICARAGUA.

Compare with type 7 and type 8.

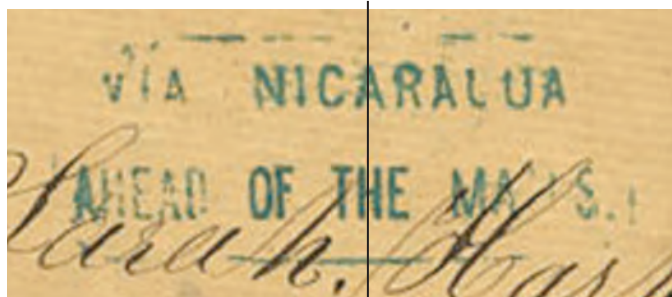


e

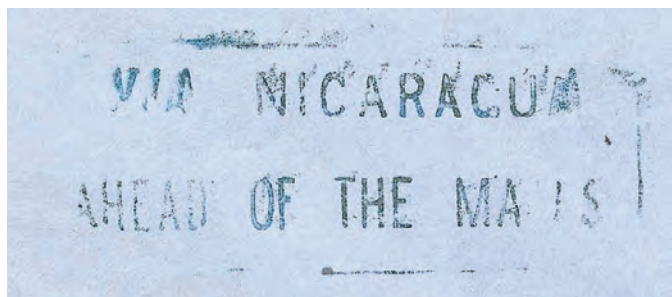
a



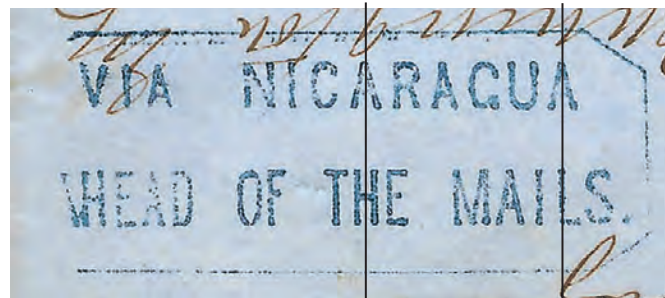
b



c



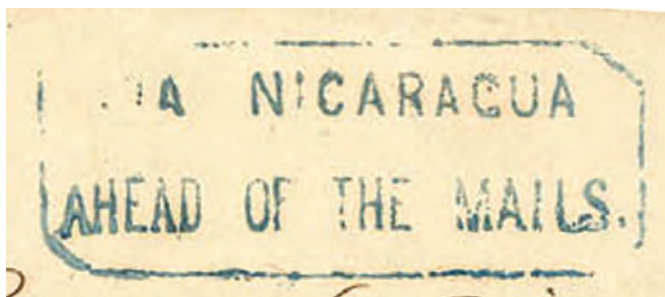
d



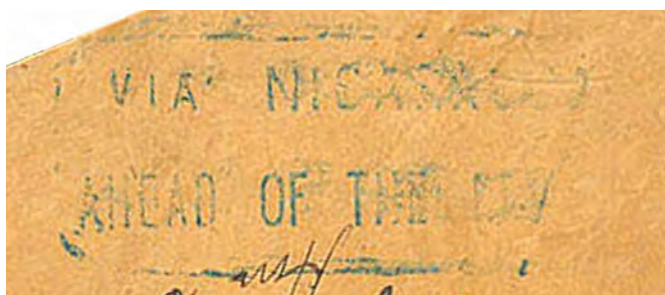
f



g



h



i

- (a) 1853 April 1 or 1854 April 1
- (b) 1853 April 1 or 1854 April 1
- (c) 1855 February 9 (1853 January 31 also fits)
- (d) 1853 September 16

- (e) 1853 December 16
- (f) 1853 July 1
- (g) 1853 July 15
- (h) via Panama 1853 November 1 or 1854 November 1
- (i) 1854 February 1

7 two-line in chamfered box L points between U and A

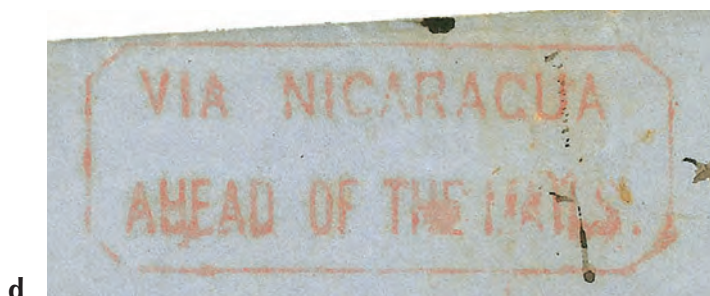
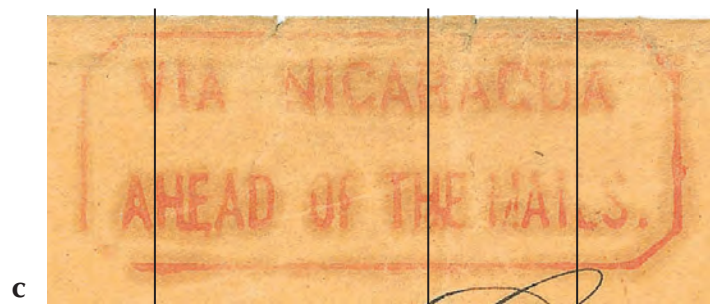
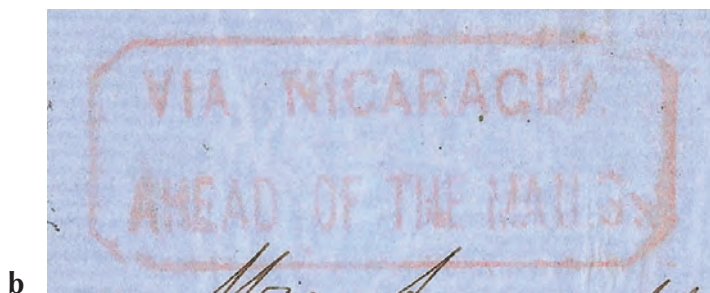
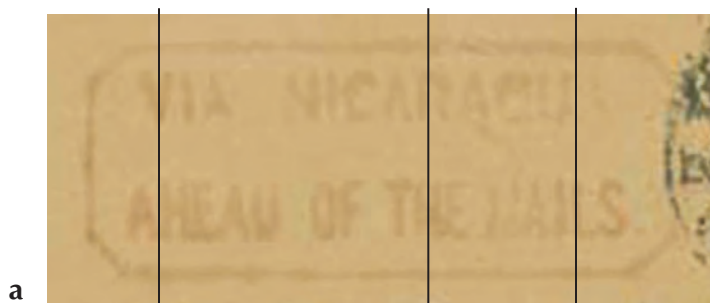
In this marking, the "H" in THE is mostly under the "R" in NICARAGUA, and the "L" in MAILS points between "UA" in NICARAGUA.

Compare with type 6 and type 8.

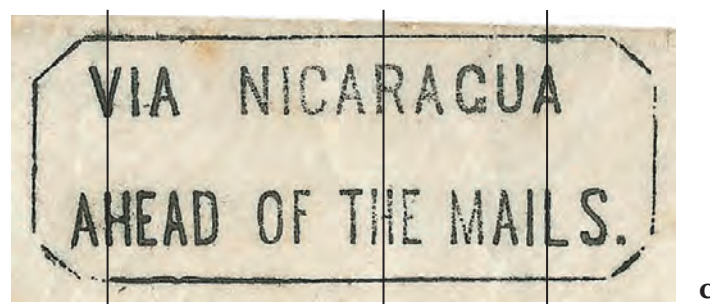
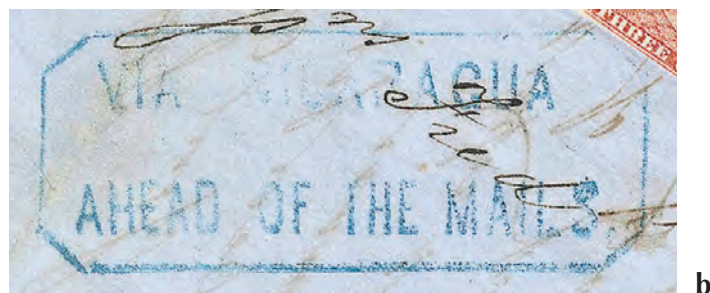
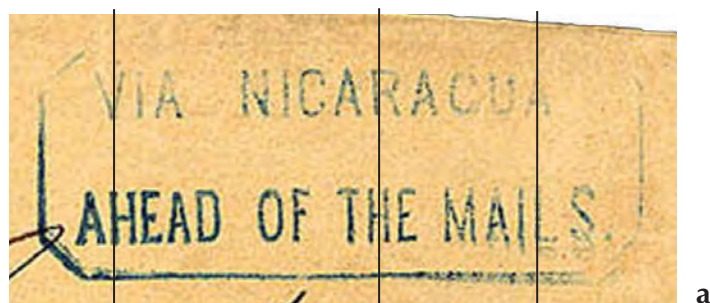
8 two-line in chamfered box wide space after NICARAGUA

In this marking, the "H" in THE is mostly under the "R" in NICARAGUA, and the "L" in MAILS points almost to the apex of the "A" in NICARAGUA.

Compare with type 6 and type 7.



- (a) 1853 August 16 bisected 12¢
- (b) 1853 August 16 bisected 12¢
- (c) 1853 August 16 bisected 12¢
- (d) 1853 August 16 or 1854 August 16

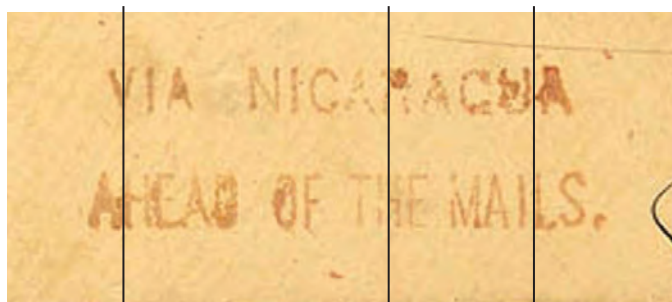


- (a) 1854 November 24 or 1853 November 16
- (b) 1853 December 16
- (c) 1853 or 1854 Supplied From Sullivan's oval on back

9 chamfered box mostly missing

The box could be worn down, or this example could merely be a poor strike.

Similar to type 7.



1854 January 16

11 Nicaragua Line oval

NICARAGUA LINE /
IN ADVANCE /
OF THE MAIL.



a

1853 December 20 from New York City --
cover bearing this example is shown below



This folded letter datelined December 19, 1853, at New York City was marked at New York City with the "NICARAGUA LINE / IN ADVANCE / OF THE MAIL." oval, an Accessory Transit Co. marking. The letter is addressed to San Juan del Sud [or Sur] (located on the Pacific Ocean) and is endorsed "Via Nicaragua."

10 Steamer Sierra Nevada oval

STM. SIERRA NEVADA /
VIA NICARAGUA /
ADVANCE OF THE MAILS.



a



b

(a) 1854 July 15

(b) 1854 October 24



b

1854 March 20 from New York City

"NICARAGUA LINE / IN ADVANCE / OF THE MAIL." oval on cover March 20, 1854, from New York City sent via Nicaragua to San Francisco and given there to Adams & Co. for delivery to Stockton, California. This cover traveled entirely outside the U.S. mails.

12 Via Nicaragua oval

VIA NICARAGUA /
IN ADVANCE OF THE MAILS.



1853 October 1



1855 August 18

13 Via Nicaragua oval SULLIVAN at bottom

VIA . NICARAGUA /
IN ADVANCE OF THE MAILS
SULLIVAN

This type includes a widely spaced period after VIA.

It is assumed that this marking signifies a mail-piece accepted and marked by Sullivan as a San Francisco letter bag operator.



1854 December 9

The VIA . NICARAGUA Sullivan oval is documented in red on an October 27, 1854, California edition of the New York *Herald* newspaper along with a black SUPPLIED FROM / J.W. SULLIVAN'S / NEWSPAPER OFFICE, / NEXT DOOR TO THE POST OFFICE / KEARNEY ST. SAN FRANCISCO oval (Rumsey sale No. 26, lot No. 177). This example of the VIA . NICARAGUA Sullivan oval is believed to have been struck in San Francisco on arrival.

The VIA . NICARAGUA Sullivan oval is documented in black on a December 23, 1854, issue of *Illustrated London News* along with a black FROM / J.W. SULLIVAN / FEB 5 / NEWS DEPOT / SAN FRANCISCO / CAL shield (Frajola sale No. 24, lot No. 195). This VIA . NICARAGUA oval also is believed to have been struck in San Francisco on arrival.

The SUPPLIED FROM oval marking shown below and in Figure 8 on page 35 is struck on an illustrated lettersheet sold by Sullivan.

Three paragraphs above revised May 2016.



circa 1854-1855

14 J. Hawes & Co.'s Express

Hawes was formed in December 1854.

J. HAWES & CO.'S / EXPRESS / S.F. & N.Y.



1855 March 24 San Francisco departure
via Nicaragua to New Orleans

15 Noisy Carriers negative

NOISY CARRIERS / VIA . NICARAGUA /
PUBLISHING HALL



blue (greenish) circa 1853-1854

16 Noisy Carriers crowned box

FORWARDED / VIA / NICARAGUA / FROM /
NOISY CARRIERS PUBLISHING HALL /
SAN FRANCISCO



1854 February 1



PUBLISHED BY CHARLES P. KIMBALL, NOISY CARRIERS PUBLISHING HALL,
LONG WHARF, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA.

View of San Francisco from Long Wharf looking southwest, 1850s,
previously called Central Wharf and later Commercial Street Wharf.

17 Noisy Carrier's nameplate

FROM / NOISY CARRIER'S. / MAIL. /
77 LONG WHARF S.F. CAL.

Most examples of this marking are struck on covers handled by the San Francisco post office and carried on a U.S. mail contract steamship via Panama.



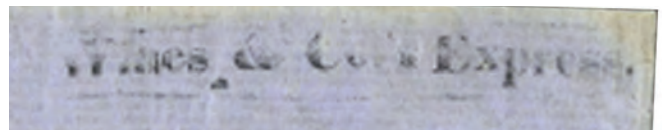
1854 February 1 via Nicaragua

18 Wines Express straightline

Wines & Co's Express.

G.H. Wines and Co. had offices in New York City and San Francisco and an affiliation with William Walker in Granada. After Walker and his filibusters seized Granada on October 13, 1855, Walker forced a coalition government on the Nicaraguans.

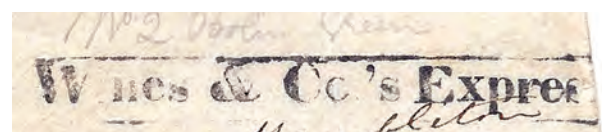
The Walker government included a postal service, and for a time in at least 1856, J.H. Ruggles of G.H. Wines and Co. served in Granada as postmaster general for Walker and his allies.



a



b



c

- (a) 1855 or 1856 -- San Francisco arrival
- (b) 1855 or 1856 -- place of origin uncertain
- (c) 1856 February 4 -- San Francisco departure

19 Wines Express oval

G.H. WINES & Co. / CALIFORNIA EXPRESS /
NO. 2 BOWLING GREEN NEW YORK.



a



b

- (a) red 1856 October 18 -- New York City arrival
(b) blue 1856 February 28 -- New York City arrival

20 Granada double oval

REPUBLICA DE NICARAGUA /
ADMN. DE CORREOS
DE GRANADA



a



b

- (a) 1855 or 1856 -- Nicaragua departure to San Francisco
(b) 1855 or 1856, July or August -- via Granada and New Orleans
to New York City; place of origin uncertain

Description (b) revised May 2016.

21 Wells, Fargo & Co.

examples of markings

See also page 50.



a

Wells, Fargo & Co. Sacramento oval under 3¢ stamps. Possibly via Nicaragua route from San Francisco to New York where it was marked "N.YORK STEAMSHIP," then to Cincinnati. Effective April 1, 1855, the rate for more than 3,000 miles was 10 cents.



b

Cover circa 1855 (Lucas, Turner & Co. bank built 1853-1854) endorsed "Wells Fargo & Co via Nicaragua" and with "WELLS, FARGO & Co. / CALIFORNIA EXPRESS / COURT SQUARE / BOSTON" shield marking, via New York City and via Nicaragua to San Francisco. This cover was conveyed entirely outside the U.S. mails.



c

Circa 1855 (10¢ rate) from San Francisco to New York City. Handled by Wells, Fargo & Co. "WELLS, FARGO & CO. / Express / SAN FRANCISCO." and endorsed "via Nicaragua" and "to be kept till called for." This cover was conveyed entirely outside the U.S. mails.

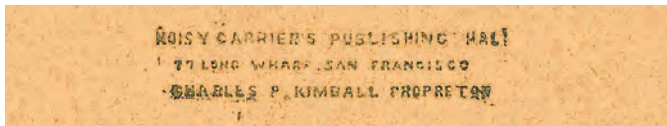
Noisy Carrier's markings not documented with Nicaragua route

Noisy Carrier's three-line

NOISY CARRIER'S PUBLISHING HALL / 77
LONG WHARF SAN FRANCISCO / CHARLES P.
KIMBALL PROPRIETOR [proprietor].

See also page 50.

a



Three-line Noisy Carrier's marking on cover postmarked at San Francisco July 1 (1854 or 1853). By U.S. mail steamers to Panama and to New York City, then onward. One stamp probably reused.

Description revised May 2016.

Noisy Carrier's fancy

By Mail Steamer / FROM / NOISY CARRIER'S.

b



Fancy Noisy Carrier's marking on cover postmarked at San Francisco December 5 (1855-1857 or 1859). U.S. mail steamers to Panama and New York City, then to Philadelphia, 10¢ rate as of April 1, 1855.

Description revised May 2016.

Noisy Carrier's oval

NOISY CARRIER'S / MAIL. / SAN FRANCISCO.



c



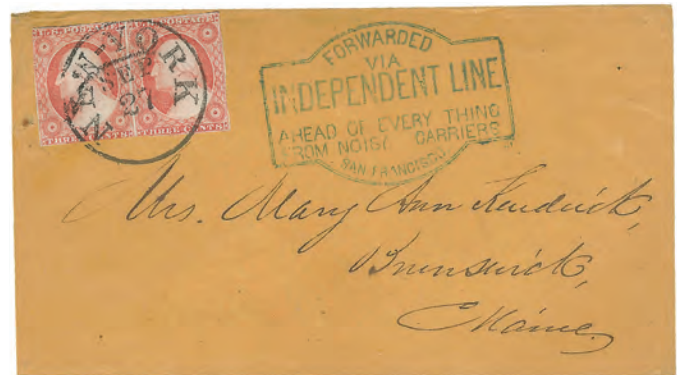
Oval Noisy Carrier's marking on cover postmarked at San Francisco February 5 (1856, 1857, 1858, or 1859). To Panama and New York City, then to Maine, 10¢ rate effective April 1, 1855.

Description revised May 2016.

Noisy Carrier's Independent Line

FORWARDED / VIA / INDEPENDENT LINE /
AHEAD OF EVERY THING / FROM NOISY
CARRIERS / SAN FRANCISCO.

This marking refers to the line via Panama that Vanderbilt established in late 1853 and early 1854 to compete with former partners White and Morgan.



d

Noisy Carriers marking for Vanderbilt Independent Line on cover from San Francisco via Panama. From Aspinwall by George Law to New York City September 26 (1854) and sent onward the next day.

Central American Transit Company

C.A.T. Co. / SAN JUAN DEL NORTE
in circle with month and day



Folded letter docketed at Greytown November 20, 1867, to New York City, Lanman & Kemp, and marked C.A.T. Co. / SAN JUAN DEL NORTE / MAR ? 14 ? Endorsed as received March 24, 1868.

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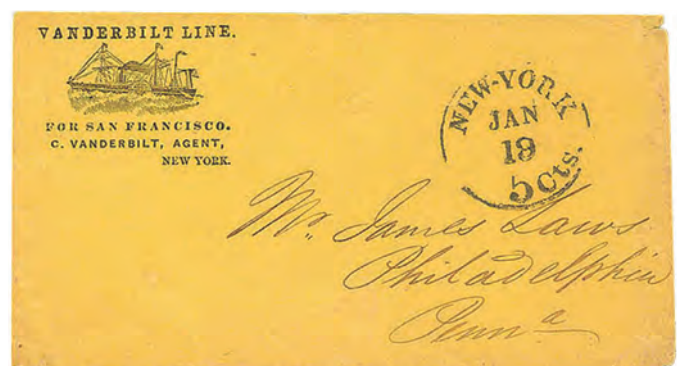
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Walske, Steven C., and Richard C. Frajola, *Mails of the Westward Expansion, 1803-1861*, Western Cover Society, 2015, 320 pages. Includes "Appendix E, Via Nicaragua Sailings, 1851 to 1856: Eastbound Trips Via Nicaragua" and "Appendix C, Via Panama Sailings, 1849 to 1861: Eastbound Trips Via Panama." A precursor to this book was "Overland Mails of the Westward Expansion: 1832 to 1869," no date, rfrajola.com, 96 pages.

Walske, Steven C., and Richard C. Frajola, *Mails of the Westward Expansion, 1803-1861: Appendix C, Via Panama Sailings: Westbound Trips Via Panama*, 2015, rfrajola.com, 2015, 18 pages.

West, Neal, "The Momotombo Stamp and the Nicaragua Canal," *Nicarao*, 1993, 3:3, pages 2-5.

West, Neal, "The Nicaragua Canal Propaganda Circular and Stamp," *Nicarao*, 1993, 4:1, pages 2-6. The Bunau-Varilla papers at the Library of Congress include a typed propaganda leaflet and a printed version of the same leaflet. ■



Vanderbilt Line envelope for the company's New York City office, sent from New York to Philadelphia at the 5¢ rate for an unpaid letter. This rate was in effect July 1, 1851, through March 31, 1855.



NICARAO



The Philatelic Journal of the Nicaragua Study Group

N O V E M B E R 2 4 2 0 1 5

Stafford Seebecks win gold at Hong Kong international

Glen Stafford won a gold medal for his eight-frame exhibit titled *Nicaraguan Postal Stationery (The Seebeck Years)* at the 31st Asian International Stamp Exhibition held in Hong Kong in November.

Stafford is a Nicaragua Study Group member. He lives in Australia.

The show was held November 20-23, 2015, at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre in the Wan Chai district of Hong Kong.

The award is the first international gold for the exhibit and the first international gold for an exhibit of Nicaragua postal stationery comprising only the Seebeck issues of 1890-1899. ■

Issue quantity only 2,000 for new sheet honoring seniors

Nicaragua issued its first new stamps of 2015 on October 1. The stamps commemorate the International Day of Older Persons, the Día Internacional del Adulto Mayor.

The United Nations General Assembly voted to establish the day on December 14, 1990.

Jean-Michel Maes of Nicaragua, a Nicaragua Study Group member, provided the scan of the sheet pictured here.

Maes said: "This new issue of stamps from Nicaragua is the first of this year and probably also will be the last one. The Nicaraguan office of social security financed the issue.

"Note that the denominations match current mailing rates, but only 2,000 sheets were issued, a very low quantity.

"The social security administration received half of the issue. Why? People at the philatelic bureau said the stamps were for social security office mail or as a gift.

"The sheet of six stamps includes denominations of 50 centavos, 1 cordoba (C\$), C\$4, C\$7, C\$13.50, and C\$20. C\$13.50 is the letter rate to Europe. It would be useful if the sheet had included C\$10 and C\$16 stamps for the respective letter rates to the United States and the rest of the world."

The sheet is pictured at the left. ■

Plan now to attend the study group meeting at World Stamp Show New York 2016

The international show will be held in New York City May 28 through June 4, 2016, Saturday through Saturday.

The Nicaragua Study Group will meet Thursday, June 2, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, 655 West 34th Street, the site of the show.



Día Internacional del Adulto Mayor sheet issued October 1.

NEWS-CURRENT BROADSHEET NO. 1

This page is a modified reprint of the broadsheet distributed to study group members by e-mail on November 24, 2015.



NICARAO



The Philatelic Journal of the Nicaragua Study Group

J A N U A R Y 9 2 0 1 6

Scott adds Momotombo squares and many Sandinista issues

The Scott *Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue*, in its Volume 5 published in fall 2015, added new listings for the six imperforate Mount Momotombo squares used on mail during 1902-1904. Volume 5 of the catalog also added various Sandinista stamps issued in 1980-1981. Here are the Scott numbers:

133A-133G: Mount Momotombo 5c 10c 20c 30c 50c measuring 55 millimeters by 52 mm and 2c 4c measuring 51 mm by 51 mm

1101-1101D: International Year of the Child 20c 90c 2cor 2.20cor 10cor overprinted in silver 1979 / AÑO DE LA LIBERACION / [Olympic rings] / PARTICIPACION NICARAGUA / OLIMPIADAS 1980 / [printer logo]

1101e-1101i: same as above but red overprint

1103-1103F: Albert Einstein 5c 10c 15c 20c 25c 1cor 2.75cor overprinted in silver as 1101-1101D

1104-1104G: First Anniversary of the Revolution 40c 75c 1cor 1.25cor 1.85cor 2.50cor 5cor 10cor

1106-1106D: International Year of the Child 20c 90c 2cor 2.20cor 10cor overprinted in black 1980 AÑO DE LA ALFABETIZACION / [printer logo]

1107-1107H: Albert Einstein 5c 10c 15c 20c 25c 1cor 2.75cor 10cor 10cor-on-20cor sheet overprinted in black and gold with text for various United States and Soviet Union space achievements

1113-1113F National Literacy Campaign S A N D I N O 5c 10c 30c 40c 60c 6cor 9cor

C969-C969C: Endangered Turtles 90c 2cor 2.20cor 10cor overprinted in red as 1101-1101D

C970: International Year of the Child 5cor 15cor

C973: Charles Lindbergh 20cor sheet overprinted in gold, purple and green

C974F: Roland Hill sheet overprinted in black and silver C10 / AEREO and 1980 AÑO DE LA ALFABETIZACION / [logo] 1980 MOSCU / [printer logo]

C975-C975D: Endangered Turtles 90c 2cor 2.20cor 10cor and 5cor-on-20cor souvenir sheet overprinted in red 1980 AÑO DE LA ALFABETIZACION / [printer logo: Litografía Nacional Porto]. ■

60-córdoba stamp marks centenary of Rubén Darío

Nicaragua issued a 60-córdoba stamp October 15, 2015, to mark the 100th anniversary of the death of poet, journalist and diplomat Rubén Darío (1867-1916). Darío was born Félix Rubén García Sarmiento. Under his pen name, he became the leader of the literary movement known as modernismo.

Study group member **Jean-Michel Maes** sent images of the stamp and the new-issue specifications sheet. The issue quantity is 10,000 stamps in sheets of 50. The stamp was printed by offset lithography and is gummed (water-soluble synthetic PVA).

The bottom panel of the stamp design reads "Banco Central de Nicaragua / Emitiendo confianza y estabilidad," the name of Nicaragua's central bank and its slogan. The bank was founded in 1960.

The stamp apparently was officially sponsored by the bank, similar to the sponsorship of the Día Internacional del Adulto Mayor (International Day of Older Persons) sheet issued October 1, 2015.

That sheet of six different stamps was sponsored by the Instituto Nicaragüense de Seguridad Social (the Nicaraguan Institute for Social Security). ■

Plan now to attend the study group meeting at World Stamp Show New York 2016

The Nicaragua Study Group will meet Thursday, June 2, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center, 655 West 34th Street, the site of the show.

NEWS-CURRENT BROADSHEET NO. 2

This page is a modified reprint of the broadsheet distributed to study group members by e-mail on January 9, 2016.



Nicaragua issued this 60-córdoba stamp October 15, 2015, to honor poet Rubén Darío.

Corrections included in revision of May 2016

A revised PDF file of this April 2016 issue of *Nicarao*, 25:2, was distributed to study group members in early May 2016. The revised PDF file incorporates all corrections and minor revisions listed in the following paragraphs. Corrections and minor revisions, both indicated below by underscoring, were made on the pages noted in parentheses.

(4) Spelling is Van Voorhies, second occurrence, first paragraph under "1849"

(5, 7): Name is Ephraim G. Squier.

(5, 33, 37): Name is George H. Leland.

(15): Figure 38. Cover possibly February 1855 to South Dartmouth, Massachusetts, prepaid 6¢ and given at San Francisco to a letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS. and given to an Accessory Transit Company steamship, possibly Cortes February 9, 1855, and via San Juan del Sur and Greytown to New York City March 4. Postmark not clear.

(15): Figure 40. Cover probably 1854 to Boston, Massachusetts, prepaid 6¢ and given at San Francisco to a letter bag operator or to the Accessory Transit Company wharf agent. Marked VIA NICARAGUA / AHEAD OF THE MAILS. and carried to the dock, probably to steamship Pacific April 1 to San Juan del Sur and from Greytown by Northern Light April 17 to New York City April 25. New York postmark appears to be April 25.

(17) The Figure 52 cover is substituted to eliminate duplication of the cover pictured in Figure 19.

(20): Figure 58. Cover January 4, 1857, to Barnard, Vermont, prepaid 12¢ (10¢ transcontinental rate) given to the Pacific Express Company at Auburn, California, and marked with its oval and taken to Sacramento and marked with another oval January 19, then to San Francisco. Carried by an express agent on the Pacific Mail Steamship Company steamship Golden Gate bound January 20 for Panama. Then from Aspinwall by U.S. Mail Steamship Company steamship George Law to New York City February 13 where it was sent onward the same day. See also footnote for this cover.

(21): Figure 59. Folded letter datelined October 2,

1856, at San Juan del Sur to Richmond, New York. Oval G. H. WINES & CO.'S / CALIFORNIA EXPRESS / No. 2 BOWLING GREEN – NEW YORK. Carried by a Wines agent across Nicaragua and by steamship to New York City October 18. The stamp is a replacement.

(26-27): Spelling is Aniceto Menocal.

(28-29): Spelling is Philippe Bunau-Varilla.

(29) Endnote 1: Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions: Figures 6 and 52. Endnote 2: Van Voorhies.

(42): Substitute these three paragraphs:

The VIA . NICARAGUA Sullivan oval is documented in red on an October 27, 1854, California edition of the New York *Herald* newspaper along with a black SUPPLIED FROM / J.W. SULLIVAN'S / NEWSPAPER OFFICE, / NEXT DOOR TO THE POST OFFICE / KEARNEY ST. SAN FRANCISCO oval (Rumsey sale No. 26, lot No. 177). This example of the VIA . NICARAGUA Sullivan oval is believed to have been struck in San Francisco on arrival.

The VIA . NICARAGUA Sullivan oval is documented in black on a December 23, 1854, issue of *Illustrated London News* along with a black FROM / J.W. SULLIVAN / FEB 5 / NEWS DEPOT / SAN FRANCISCO / CAL shield (Frajola sale No. 24, lot No. 195). This VIA . NICARAGUA oval also is believed to have been struck in San Francisco on arrival.

The SUPPLIED FROM oval marking shown below and in Figure 8 on page 35 is struck on an illustrated lettersheet sold by Sullivan.

(44) Markings section 20: (b) 1855 or 1856, July or August -- via Granada and New Orleans to New York City; place of origin uncertain

(45) Section for Noisy Carrier's markings not documented with Nicaragua route:

b: Fancy Noisy Carrier's marking on cover postmarked at San Francisco December 5 (1855-1857 or 1859). U.S. mail steamers to Panama and New York City, then to Philadelphia, 10¢ rate as of April 1, 1855.

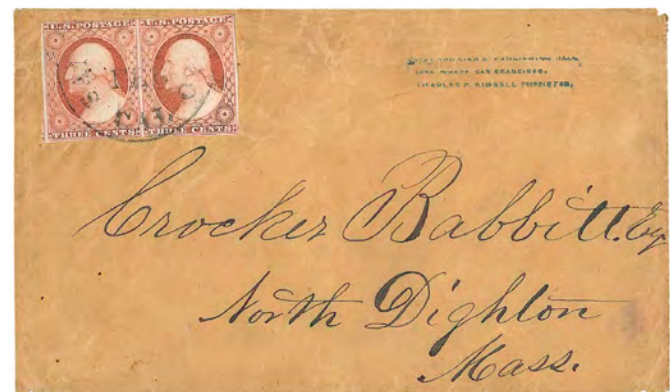
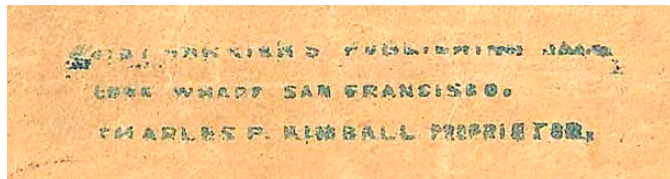
c: Oval Noisy Carrier's marking on cover postmarked at San Francisco February 5 (1856, 1857, 1858, or 1859). To Panama and New York City, then to Maine, 10¢ rate effective April 1, 1855.

Noisy Carrier's markings not documented with Nicaragua route

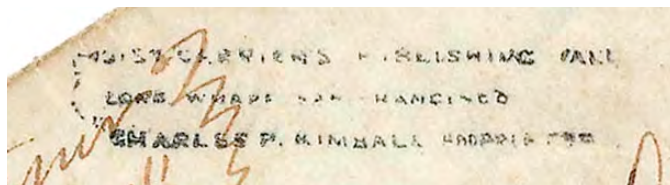
Noisy Carrier's three-line

NOISY CARRIER'S PUBLISHING HALL /
LONG WHARF SAN FRANCISCO. /
CHARLES P. KIMBALL PROPRIETOR.

no "77" and spelling "PROPRIETOR"



Cover postmarked February circa 1853-1855 at San Francisco.
By U.S. mail contract steamers via Panama and New York City.



Cover postmarked March 20, 1856, at San Francisco (with 1856
enclosure). By U.S. mail steamers via Panama and New York City.

Images Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries.

21 Wells, Fargo & Co. more examples of markings



Folded letter datelined February 8, 1855, to Lynchburg, Virginia,
marked WELLS, FARGO & CO. / EXPRESS / SAN FRANCISCO.
and PAID, franked with 3c pair precanceled W. F. & CO., from
San Francisco February 9 by Accessory Transit Company Cortes to
San Juan del Sur and from Greytown by Star of the West to New
York City March 4 from where it was sent onward the next day.

Image Thomas C. Mazza, rfajola.com No. 18784.



Government envelope March 1855 to New Brunswick, New Jersey,
marked WELLS, FARGO & CO. / EXPRESS / SAN FRANCISCO.,
from San Francisco March 24 by Accessory Transit Company
Cortes to San Juan del Sur and from Greytown by Northern Light
to New York City April 15 from where it was sent onward the
next day. New York allowed the 6c rate, which ended March 31.

Image Schuyler Rumsey Philatelic Auctions.