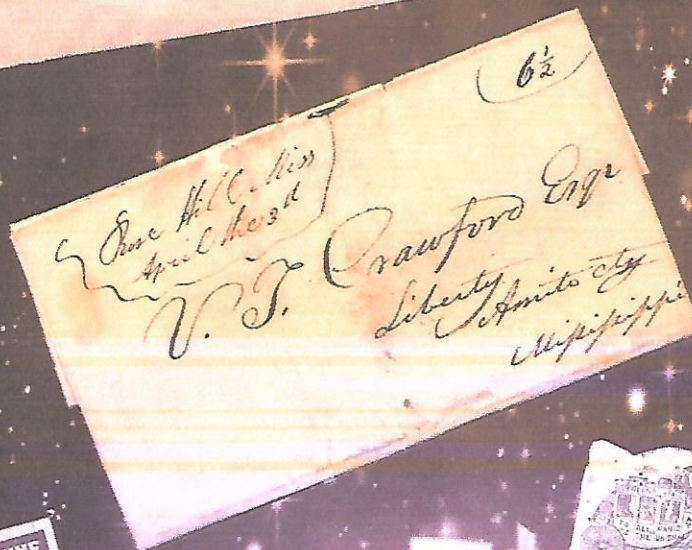
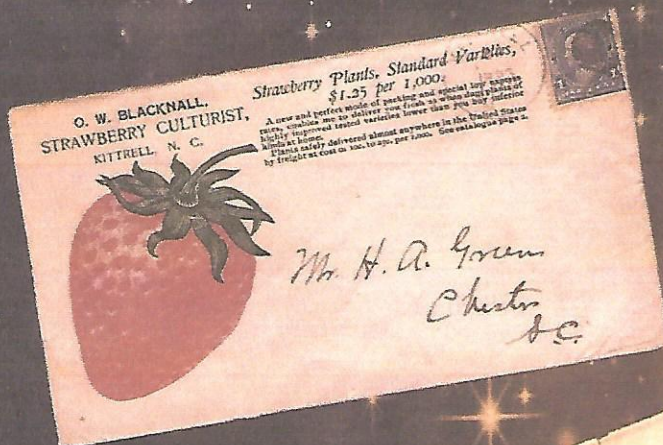
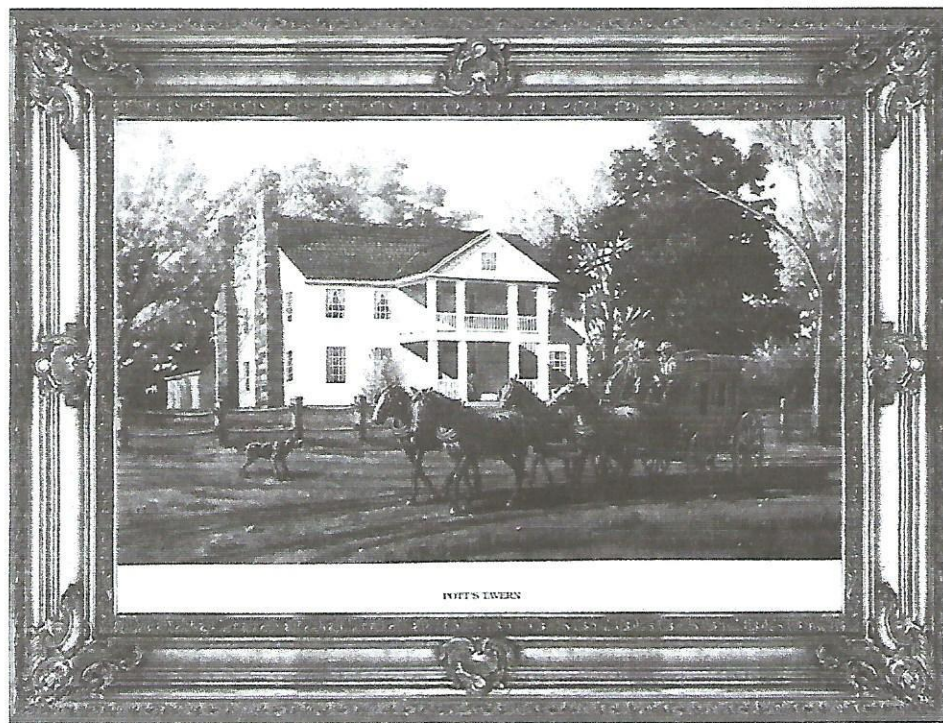


THE AMERICAN PHILATELIST

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The Magic of Research



I Lived on The Butterfield Mail Route for Decades and Didn't Know It

BOB CROSSMAN

About half a dozen years ago, my wife and I were visiting Tucson, Arizona, while my wife attended the annual gem show there. Checking the American Philatelic Society website for any retail stamp stores, I discovered the Postal History Foundation was located in Tucson. Foundation volunteers warmly greeted me at the door and gave me a tour of their amazing facility and philatelic library. I decided to join the foundation, and have kept up my membership since then.

Paul Nelson, my tour guide through the foundation, invited me to attend the annual banquet of the local stamp collecting club that was happening in just a day or two. I accepted the invitation and found a seat across from a retired couple at the restaurant. The evening was pleasant and the couple across the table invited me to their home for lunch the following day.

John Birkinbine and his wife warmly greeted me at their home, and John and I retired to his stamp room. I brought along one of the volumes of my collection of early U.S. stamps and postal history. As John slowly examined my collection, he eventually got to the pages of the 10-cent stamps and covers of 1857-1859. John looked up, smiled and said, "Oh, you have a Butterfield cover," which is shown (Figure 1).

This cover was carried "overland" on the Butterfield Overland Mail. The original letter was removed, but the cover still contains a handwritten note by Roscoe Wheeler's child, which says "Contained letter from Mother to Papa dated Nov. 20, 1860 written just before leaving Pigeon Cove for

California."

John went on to explain that the word "overland" in the upper left, along with the postmark and date, all clearly indicated that the cover had been carried by Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. stagecoach.

This was a surprise to me. I had purchased the cover – with a 10-cent green Washington of 1859 – in 2013 for less than \$100 from Rainer Gerlach, of Sooner Stamps in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I thought the word in the upper left was a return address of sorts. I had previously misread the handwriting to be "Ooiserland," and repeated searches for that city on the internet were a dead end.

John continued examining the cover and the note inside and unraveled mysteries that my cover revealed.

According to John, it is highly likely that the addressee, Roscoe Wheeler, moved to Benicia, California as part of the

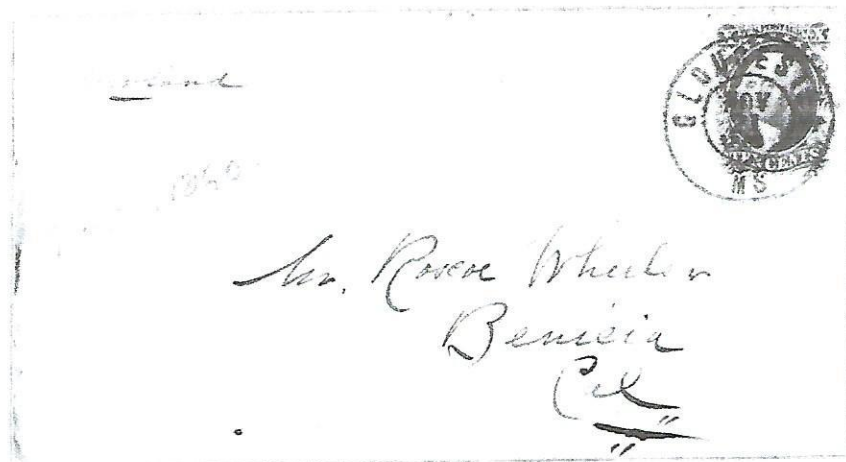


Figure 1. A cover postmarked November 29, 1860 in Massachusetts with a 10-cent green Washington (Scott 35, Type V of 1859) and eventually carried on the Butterfield Overland Mail to California.

gold rush. My cover was mailed November 20, 1860, from Pigeon Cove, Massachusetts, and hand canceled the following day at the Gloucester, Massachusetts Post Office. John said the cover arrived in St. Louis by rail at 8 a.m. on November 22, a Thursday. The cover continued traveling by rail to Tipton, Missouri, where it was transferred to Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. stagecoach to continue its journey west.

John pulled out a schedule for the Butterfield Stage from the 1860s and told me the date and time my cover had traveled through each town and swing station across country from St. Louis to San Francisco (see stagecoach itinerary sidebar).

I was fascinated that afternoon when John revealed to me that the Butterfield stage passed about 500 feet from my current home as it traveled west. I was hooked. Since that afternoon I have been searching for Butterfield postal history.

On my quest for anything Butterfield, I traveled to Midland, Texas, to visit the Nita Stewart Haley Memorial Library. The staff brought me numerous books and a large file folder of Butterfield material. In the material I found the only contemporary photograph of a Butterfield Overland Stage known to exist (Figure 2).

Butterfield used two types of stage, the Concord stagecoach and a lighter Celerity wagon, as shown in the photo, which was taken in 1861 near the Texas-New Mexico border

at the Cottonwood Stage Station.

On another Butterfield quest, I traveled just 30 miles from my home to visit the Atkins Public Library. I inquired at the desk if they had any information on Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. stage line that passed through their community



Figure 2. This is the only actual image of a Butterfield stage. According to historian Gerald Anhart, all other images are of stages from other mail lines or western movie props. The driver here is David McLaughlin. (The original of this daguerreotype photo is at the Nita Stewart Haley Memorial Library of Midland, Texas).

Stagecoach Itinerary

Tipton, Missouri, departing at 6 pm for a 10 hour trip covering 160 miles

to Springfield, Missouri, departing at 7:45 am for a 37 3/4 hour trip covering 143 miles
to Fayetteville, Arkansas, departing at 10:15 am for a 26 1/2 hour trip covering 100 miles
to Fort Smith, Arkansas, departing at 3:30 am for a 17 1/2 hour trip covering 65 miles
to Sherman, Texas, departing at 12:30 am for a 45 hour trip covering 205 miles
to Fort Belknap, Texas, departing at 9:00 am for a 32 1/2 hour trip covering 146 1/2 miles
to Fort Chadbourne, Texas, departing at 3:15 pm for a 30 1/4 hour trip covering 136 miles
to Pecos River Crossing, Texas, departing at 3:45 am for 36 1/2 hour trip covering 165 miles
to El Paso, Texas, departing at 11:00 am for a 55 1/4 hour trip covering 248 1/2 miles
to Soldier's Farewell, Texas, departing at 8:30pm for a 33 1/2 hour trip covering 150 miles
to Tucson, Arizona, departing at 1:30 pm for a 41 hour trip covering 184 1/2 miles
to Gila River, Arizona, departing at 9:00 pm for a 31 1/2 hour trip covering 141 miles
to Fort Yuma, California, departing at 3:00 am for a 30 hour trip covering 135 miles
to Los Angeles, California, departing at 8:30 am for a 53 1/2 hour trip covering 254 miles
to Fort Tejou, California, departing at 7:30 am for a 23 hour trip covering 96 miles
to Visalia, California, departing at 11:30 am for a 28 hour trip covering 127 miles
to Firebaugh's Ferry, California, departing at 5:30 am for an 18 hour trip covering 82 miles
to San Francisco, California, arriving on December 16, 1860.

After arriving in San Francisco on December 16, it was carried a short distance north by ship to Benicia, California where it awaited for Mr. Roscoe Wheeler to call for his mail at the post office.



more than 500 times between 1858 and 1861. (That number of trips is based on an average of two trips in each direction per week.) The desk clerk replied that they had never heard of the Butterfield. A patron standing at the counter, Gaynell Hays-Steaggs, turned and said, "Oh, yes, and the swing station of the Butterfield is still standing on S.E. 4th street just east of the Austin School Crossing Road intersection."

In my quest for all things Butterfield, I have driven the route across the state, stopping at every county museum, historical marker, and library I could find. I wish I had a dollar for the number of times my inquiries only resulted in blank stares. On this unique occasion, I received a positive response, not from the librarian but rather a patron who just happened to be standing next to be at the counter. What fortuitous luck!

After expressing my appreciation, within five minutes I was parked in front of the original swing station still standing on a dirt road that was once the Old Military Road from Memphis to Fort Smith (Figure 3).

The Hurricane Butterfield Swing Station sits on S.E. 4th Street, just east of Union Grove/Austin School road in Atkins, Arkansas. The larger gambrel roof red barn behind the swing station was built some years after the Butterfield stage stopped running.



Figure 3. This is the Hurricane Butterfield Swing Station on S.E. 4th Street, just east of Union Grove/Austin School road in Atkins, Arkansas.

Bradley Harris reports that his grandmother lives just 200 yards west of this red building, and she grew up hearing the story and knowing that this was indeed the swing station of the Butterfield Overland Stage from 1858 to 1861. This was confirmed as the original stage station by Dena Gray, whose father, Dean Freeman, owns the property and lives in a home across the street. The house and barn were previously owned by Freeman's father-in-law, Neal Cornell Gibson. Gibson's nephew, Lucky Gibson, reports that there is a cemetery in the woods just northeast of the barn. A historical headstone-shaped marker is located to the west of this location near the 4th Street and Highway 105 intersection.

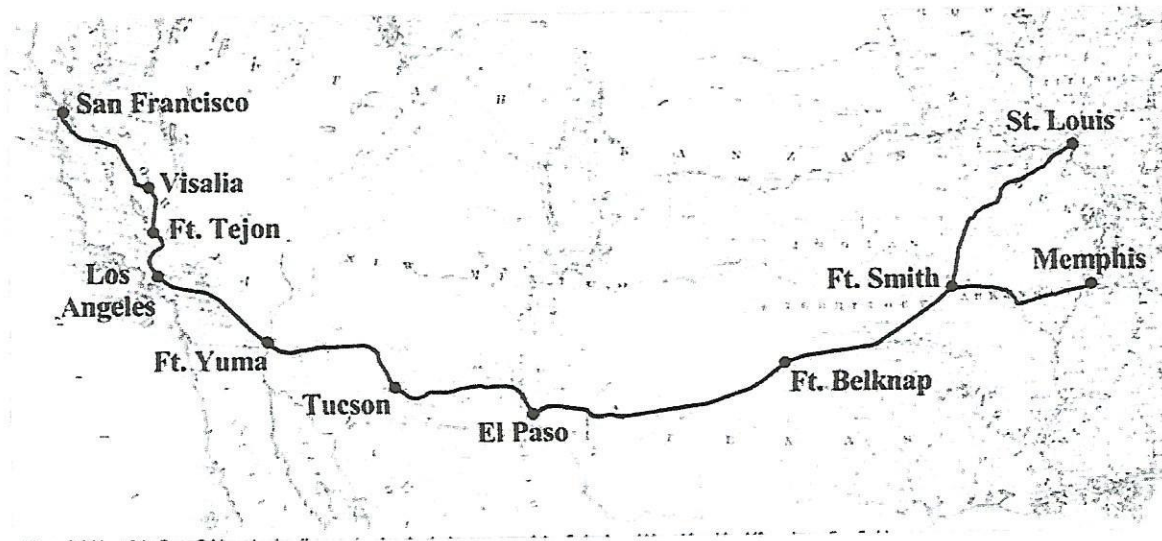
On another Butterfield quest, I traveled just 40 miles from my home to visit the Potts Butterfield Home Station (Figure 4). Forty-five years ago after completing graduate school, I lived just a block away from the Potts House, but at the time I had no knowledge of the Butterfield Overland Mail. Today, the Potts station is 38 miles from my home.

I learned a lot by visiting as the Potts Home Station has a paid tour guide on duty at all times. I discovered that at this home station not only would the team of horses be changed and the axles greased, but the travelers had an opportunity to have a meal. Passengers could even rest for a night or two in hopes of an empty seat on the next stage later in the week.

Meals cost the passengers from 40 cents to a dollar. At isolated stations, fare might be wormy biscuits and grease-laden meat of unknown source. At more civilized stations,

Unusual Resources

I posted inquiries about the Hurricane Swing Station on the "Atkins, Arkansas Memories" Facebook page. Within a month I received 91 replies offering leads that I tracked down. -Bob Crossman



Map 1. The 3,143-mile Butterfield Overland Mail Company route from Memphis and St. Louis to San Francisco, Sept. 1858 to March 1861. (Courtesy of *Mails of the Westward Expansion, 1803 to 1861.*)

Map 2. A map shows the southern route of Butterfield's Overland Mail (in green), and also the northern route Butterfield began using in spring of 1861 avoiding all of the southern states. The part of the route sub-contracted is in blue, and the portion retained by the Overland Mail Co. is in red. (Courtesy of *Mails of the Westward Expansion, 1803 to 1861.*)

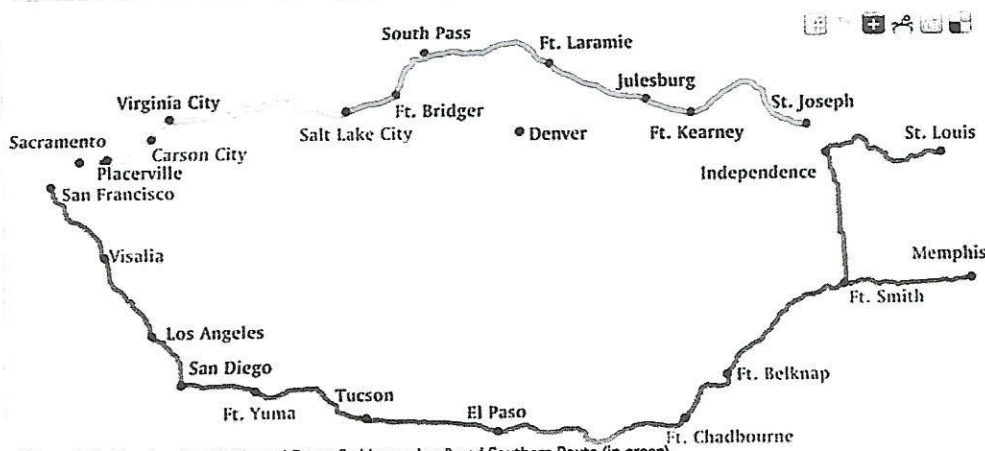


Figure 13-1. Map showing the Central Route (in blue and red) and Southern Route (in green).

such as the Potts home, passengers came to expect a hearty meal of hot cakes, corn bread, biscuits, pork, fish or wild game, beans, bread, butter, sweet milk and coffee.

We don't have a unique report for conditions at Potts Station. However, A.C. Greene, in his book, *900 Miles on the Butterfield Trail*, wrote that typically, "at the stage Home Station you would find a stationmaster in charge, a handful of hostlers to care for the animals, and perhaps a rough eating house or restaurant. The buildings would be of logs, whipsawed lumber, sod or adobe, depending on the location. There'd probably be a tin basin on a bench beside the door where you could wash up, aided by some soft soap in a side dish - soap that would curl the hide off a hippo. A roller towel that had seen better days, and a more or less toothless comb, detained by a rawhide string, would help you complete your toilette. Inside there'd be a big fireplace, acid sputtering tallow candles ... your meal would be the inevitable hog and hominy or beef and beans of the frontier."

Why did John Butterfield get the contract?

Let's take a moment now to see how this historic mail route began (Map 1).

Although several bids were received for Mail Contract No. 12578, John Butterfield, a transportation pioneer in the

mid-19th century, was chosen.

Among the bidders, Butterfield was already a transportation pioneer of the mid-19th century. Butterfield had previously started numerous stagelines based in his hometown of Utica, New York.

"At the height of stagecoaching [Butterfield] had forty lines running from Utica as headquarters to Ogdensburg and Sacketts Harbor on the North, and South to the Pennsylvania line, and through Chemung and Susquehanna valleys," said a report in an 1894 edition of the Oswego [N.Y.] *Weekly Palladium*.

Butterfield soon expanded his transportation empire, the newspaper went on to report.

"He became interested in packet boats on the [Erie] canal, and in steamboats on Lake Ontario, in the construction of plank roads leading to Utica and was the originator of its street railroads. He more than any other secured the building of the Black River and Southern railroads. When the practical uses of the electrical telegraph were demonstrated he joined Faxton, Wells, Livingston and others in establishing the New York, Albany and Buffalo Telegraph Company, and urged the extension of other lines and companies. ... He was a pioneer in the transportation business, and aided in developing it from the crude methods of the stagecoach to those of the fast trains of our own time."

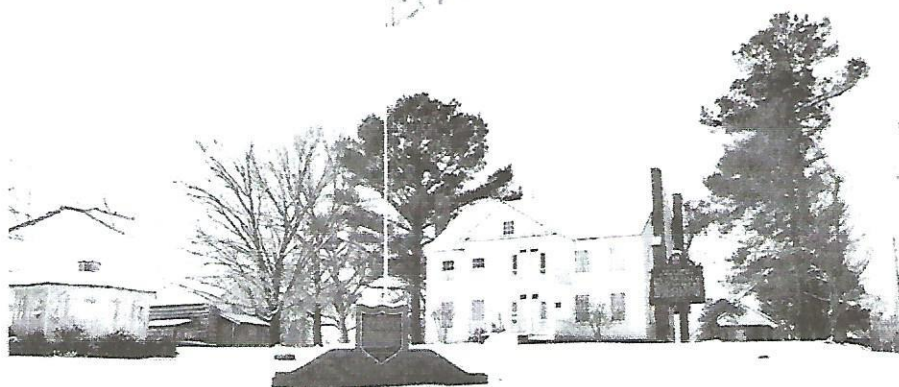


Figure 4. The Potts Butterfield Home Station was built by Kirkbride Potts in 1858 in Galla Creek, Arkansas. Potts was the station agent as well as the official postmaster for Galla Creek. The building today houses the Faulkner County Museum. The print here and at top of article is titled "Potts Tavern" and was painted in 1984 by artist Gloria McMahan. (Photo of estate by Margaret Motley, chair Pope County Museum; photo of sign courtesy of Potts Inn Museum.)



POTT'S TAVERN

On September 16, 1857, Mail Contract No. 12578 to carry mail from St. Louis and Memphis to San Francisco for \$600,000 per annum was awarded to Butterfield's Overland Mail Company. This was the longest mail contract ever awarded in the United States. The Overland Mail was a stockholding company whose main stockholders were Butterfield, president; William B. Dinsmore, of New York City; William G. Fargo, of Pompey, New York; James V.P. Gardner, of Utica, New York; Marquis L. Kenyon, of Rome, New York; Alexander Holland, of New York City; and Hamilton Spencer, of Bloomington, Illinois.

Butterfield not only founded the Overland Mail Co., but started many companies, including American Express, (Figure 5) which is still in operation today.

Why was the Butterfield Overland Stage such a big deal?

The Butterfield Overland Mail Company carried pas-

sengers and mail from two eastern terminals – Memphis, Tennessee, and St. Louis, Missouri – to San Francisco, California. The routes from each eastern terminus met at Fort Smith, Arkansas, and then continued through Oklahoma Indian Territory, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Mexico, and California ending in San Francisco.

The 3,143-mile route (including the 322 miles from Memphis to Fort Smith) of the Butterfield accomplished several things.

Prior to the establishment of this stage, the usual route to California was by steamship around South America, or by steamship to Panama to cross the Isthmus overland and then by a second steamship up the coast to California. After California threatened to secede from the United States if a faster mail service was not established, Congress voted in 1857 to subsidize a mail run from the Mississippi River to San Francisco.

Secondly, this new route would shorten communica-

tion time between western gold miners and families back East to only 23 days, instead of the several months it took for a letter or passengers to travel by ship and cross the Panama Isthmus. The steamships to Panama only ran twice a month, while the new Butterfield stages ran twice a week.

Third, the improved road and almost 200 stations along the route increased the safety for immigrants making the westward journey to California by foot, personal wagon, or horseback.

Also, the Butterfield route strengthened the tie between California and the U.S., helping to ensure California's loyalties stayed with the Union.

The cover shown (Figure 6) could have been carried by Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. However, the sender preferred it be carried by steamship and expressed that by writing "Via Panama" in the lower left. Up until late December 1859, the default transcontinental carrier for the post office remained by steamship to Panama.

How far apart were the Butterfield Stations?

According to the April 16, 1858, issue of the *Arkansas Intelligencer*, Van Buren, Arkansas, one of the major stockholders and directors of the Butterfield, Marquis I. Kenyon of Rome, New York and Butterfield's son, John Jr., started in January 1858 back from San Francisco by mule to select the trail as well as the sites for the stage stations.

Construction crews started from each end of the line to establish stage stations all along the route. Initially, 139 stations were secured, and 60 more were added within the first year. Ideally they were to be 17 miles apart, but local conditions, such as dependable water supply, often increased this distance to 30 or 40 miles.

The stations were of two types: simpler swing stations where two or three employees would quickly change the tired horses or mules with fresh teams; and home stations that also housed a station master, herders, harness makers, cooks and blacksmiths. At the home stations, located about every 60 miles, the stagecoach received a fresh driver and conductor as well as fresh horses.

How many stagecoaches were in operation?

In all, there were 34 stagecoaches and 66 stage Celerity wagons spread along the 3,134-mile route, (including the 322 miles from Memphis to Fort Smith).

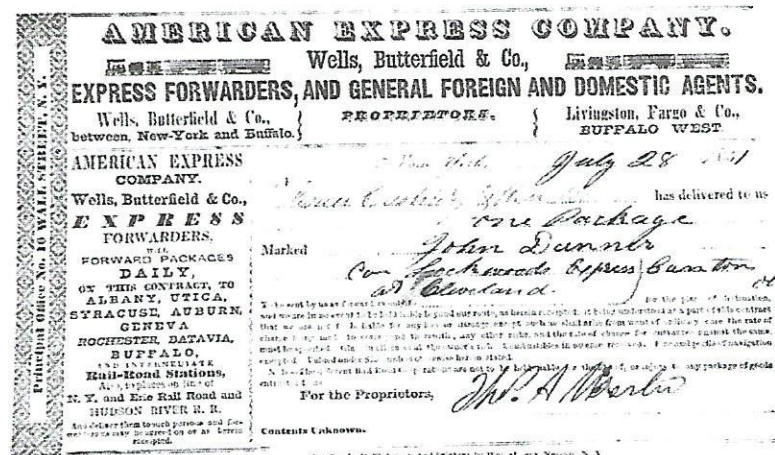


Figure 5. This 1851 original waybill is from Wells, Butterfield & Co.'s American Express Company. The waybill reveals that Butterfield's American Express stagecoaches made daily trips to Albany, Utica, Syracuse, Auburn, Geneva, Rochester, Batavia, Buffalo and intermediate railroad stations.

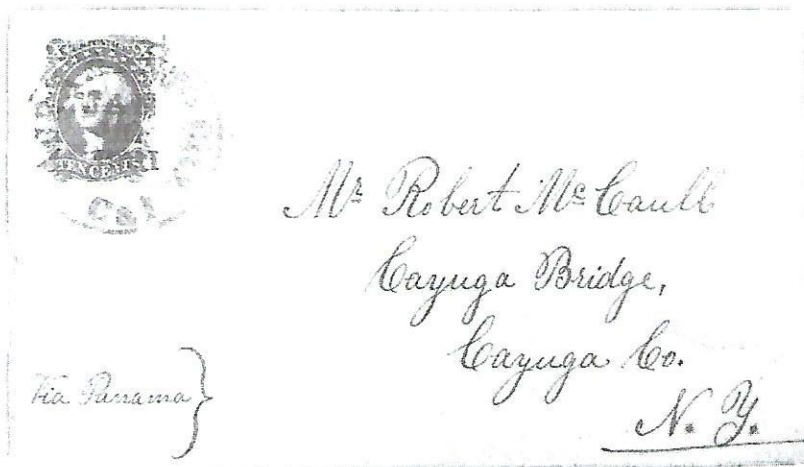


Figure 6. This cover sent east via steamship and the Panama route is franked with the 10-cent Washington of 1859 (Scott 35), which pays postage for distances more than 3,000 miles.

Along some portions of the route, Butterfield used a lighter stage with a lower center of gravity, called a Celerity wagon. The interior was similar, but the top was oilcloth and unable to hold passengers or mail bags on the roof.

Butterfield employed more than 1,000 drivers, conductors, station-keepers, blacksmiths, mechanics, wheelwrights, helpers, hostlers, herders, veterinarians, armed guards, and harness makers along the route. When the stage pulled up to a station, the hostlers were given 10 minutes to grease the axles and hitch a fresh team so the stage could be on its way.

The Overland Mail made two trips a week between September 1858 and March 1861. Each Monday and Thursday morning, at the same hour, a stagecoach would leave Memphis, St. Louis and San Francisco on their cross-continent journeys, carrying passengers and up to 12,000 letters. At the Fort Smith Home Station, where the two routes merged, this resulted in six stages each way weekly at Fort Smith, with 14 stages on the road at any given moment.

What's with the horn?

The post horn notified any nearby residents that the mail was about to be dropped off at the station. The horn was also blown two or three miles before arriving at the next station to notify the station keepers to begin preparations for the hungry passengers and animals. Mail coaches had tight schedules and traveled at high speed, and a blast of the horn would warn riders or wagons ahead to move to the side.

When the stage was about to leave the station the Butterfield conductor would call "All Aboard!" and then blow a horn to signal that the coach was about to move.

An overland stage passenger in 1859 wrote in the San Francisco Bulletin: "The blast of the stage horn as it rolls through the valleys and over the prairies of the west, cheers and gladdens the heart of the pioneer. As it sounds through the valleys... it sends a thrill of delight... He knows that it brings tidings (mail) from the hearts and homes he left behind him; it binds him stronger and firmer to his beloved country. So regular is its arrival that the inhabitants know almost the hour and the minute when the welcome sound of the post horn will reach them. The Overland is the most popular institution in the Far West."



The post horn (also posthorn, post-horn, or coach horn) was a valveless cylindrical brass or copper instrument with cupped mouthpiece. The instrument commonly had a circular or coiled shape with three turns of the tubing, though sometimes it was straight. The cornet was developed from the post horn by adding valves. This horn is in the author's collection.

Butterfield cut the postal delivery time by more than half

The lettersheet shown (Figure 7) was mailed eight years before the Butterfield mail stage began operations. This cover, sent via an unknown carrier, took 60 days to travel 529 miles. In contrast, the Butterfield mail traveled over many of these same roads, but continued for an additional 2,300 miles, completing that distance in only 23 days by traveling almost non-stop day and night.

Although mailed from Jackson, Tennessee, eight years prior to the establishment of the Butterfield route, this letter would have traveled over the same Old Military Road that the Butterfield would eventually travel through Memphis to Little Rock. At Fort Smith this letter left the route, and traveled south toward Texarkana and on to its destination of Palestine, Texas.

How fast did they travel?

Coaches averaged 5 miles per hour, completing the entire trip from Memphis (or St. Louis) to San Francisco in only 21 to 25 days. On smooth, level portions of the road they could reach 12 mph, but sometimes in heavy

sand or mud, hours were spent going only 3 or 4 miles.

Travel time from Fort Smith to Memphis averaged 91 hours. However, the operation of stagecoaches between Memphis and Fort Smith proved troublesome from the beginning. Initially, the Butterfield Overland Mail Co. intended to move mail and passengers from Memphis to Fort Smith by steamboat, but the low water levels of the Arkansas River throughout the summer of 1858 forced Butterfield to hastily contract with an existing stage service, Chidester, Reeside & Co., to provide passenger and mail service on the route from Memphis to Fort Smith from September 18, 1858



Figure 7. This lettersheet from Jackson, Tennessee was mailed June 6, 1850 to Palestine, Texas, 529 miles away. It was received 60 days later on Aug. 6, 1850. We don't know the carrier.

to about February 1, 1859.”

By February of 1859 the Butterfield company took charge of this portion of the route and improved operations, also adding a spur to Little Rock after protests that the Arkansas capital had been bypassed. On four occasions when the Arkansas River returned to navigable levels, passengers and mail could be taken by steamboat from Fort Smith to Memphis. On about 84 additional occasions Butterfield's steamboat, *Jenny Whipple*, carried the Overland from Little Rock to Memphis, bypassing the land-based stations.

What did it cost to send a letter on the stage?

A half-ounce letter (single sheet) would cost 10 cents postage and could carry that letter all the way to a family member who had traveled to San Francisco searching for gold. For distances less than 3,000 miles the postage rate was 3 cents.

“Remember boys, nothing on God's earth must stop the U.S. mail!” That was one of Butterfield's constant admonitions to his drivers, as told by Fred Doolittle, Butterfield's great-grandson, to a newspaper reporter in 1981.

Prior to about 1910, mail was not delivered to every mailbox across the country. During the Butterfield years, in San Francisco, the gold miners needed to line up at the post office to ask if they had any mail, such as the scene shown in an 1850 lithograph (Figure 8). The caption reads, “A faithful representation of the crowds daily applying at that office for letters and newspapers.”

Did the stage carry passengers as well as mail?

A stagecoach carried up to 500 pounds (12,000 envelopes) of mail bags, and nie to 12 passengers. To discourage robberies along the route, Butterfield stagecoaches were not allowed to carry shipments of gold, silver, bullion, money, bank notes, or valuables of any nature.

What did it cost to be a passenger on the stage?

Originally, a simple handwritten westbound ticket to San Francisco cost \$200, and an eastbound ticket was \$100. A few months later, the rate changed to \$150 either direction. To travel a shorter distance, passengers paid 10 cents a mile.

Was that a lot of money in 1858? In 1858, for 10 cents you could either mail a letter to San Francisco, or buy 5 pounds of corn meal.

In 1858, for \$200 you could buy a ticket to ride the Butterfield Overland

Stage from Memphis or St. Louis to San Francisco, or purchase food for a family of four for a year.

In 1858, a day's pay was 90 cents; land cost \$3 to \$5 and acre; gold was \$20 and ounce; sugar was 10 cents a pound; eggs cost 20 cents a dozen; rice was 7 cents a pound; cheese 13 cents a pound; corn meal 2 cents a pound; tea 54 cents a pound, a four-room apartment rented for \$4.45 a month, and, hotel room with board was \$2.79 a month.

What were the stagecoaches like?

The Concord coach was made of hickory, with russet leather interiors with cushions and side curtains. Some of the coach bodies were red, others a dark bottle green; all under-carriages were yellow, striped in black or brown. Two candle lamps were located inside the cabin, and two carriage lamps were attached to the top front of the coach behind the driver, who sat up some six feet from the ground. The coach could carry a 4,000-pound load.

The next cover (Figure 9) is a preprinted envelope with a beautiful color rendition of a period stagecoach. The illustration shows a four-horse coach with the words “Overland Via Los Angeles” on the side of the stagecoach.

The envelope was sent by Alex Norman, who signed his name at lower left, and mailed his letter December 20, 1860, from San Pablo, California. It was first carried a few miles south to San Francisco. Based on the date, the cover was placed on the stage departing at 8 a.m. December 24 to Fort Smith. With a Kentucky destination, this cover may have traveled the Memphis route from Fort Smith.

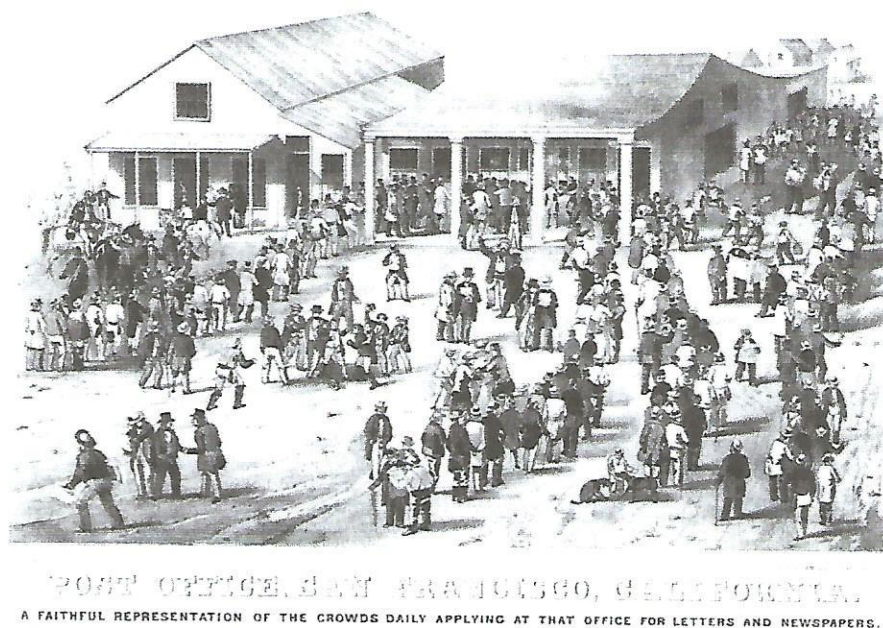


Figure 8. This 1850 lithograph print by Wm. Endicott & Co. of New York depicts long lines at each of four entrances to the post office in San Francisco. (Courtesy Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.)

The cover is addressed to James McNaughton, of Owensville, Bath County, Kentucky, who roughly opened the cover on the left. The correct postage for this trip was 10 cents. However, the green Washington stamp affixed did not originate with this cover. The original stamp either fell off in transit or was removed by a stamp collector.

Could passengers bring luggage?

Passengers were allowed up to 40 pounds of baggage, along with two blankets and a canteen.

One passenger in 1858 wrote, "Were I to travel the road over again, I would take but one pair of large warm blankets, a revolver or shotgun, and the stoutest suit I could get, with a strong loose pair of boots. Some cans of preserved fruit would prove a great luxury on the route," an 1858 *San Francisco Evening Bulletin* reported.

Were the passengers comfortable?

The passengers were not comfortable by today's standards.

Up to nine passengers sat inside on a front bench that faced backward, and middle and rear seats that faced forward. Passengers in the front and middle seats had to dangle their legs, since the seats were so close together. Up to three additional passengers could set atop or hold on to the rear of the stage.

The crowded conditions, and the fatigue of uninterrupted day and night travel led some travelers to stay overnight at one of the home stations, in hopes of catching the next stage for the remainder of the journey.

On January 4, 1859, a correspondent for the *San Francisco Evening Bulletin* wrote about his experience in central Arkansas: "When we reached Dardinelles [Dardanelle, Arkansas] it was late at night, and raining... We were most unceremoniously turned out of the coach by the driver and delivered into the charge of the ferryman, who took the mail-bags on his shoulder, and, his lantern in hand, told us to follow up to this boat at the ferry landing, about one mile distant up the river ... placing our blankets on our back, and valise in hand, the passengers proceeded to accompany him, through a torrent of rain. ... We all got soaking wet by the time we reached the coach on the opposite bank, and three of our party were considerably used up, next day, from the effects of the drenching."

In 1858, passenger Waterman Ormsby in an 1858 edition of the *New York Herald* wrote:

"After a rather rough ride of fourteen miles, which we accomplished with our excellent team in one hour and three-quarters, we took a team of four mules to cross the much dreaded Ozark range. ... I might say our road was steep, rugged, jagged, rough and moun-



Figure 9. Alex Norman, who signed his name at lower left, mailed this pre-printed cover December 20, 1860 from San Pablo, California. It went by the Butterfield Overland Stage from San Francisco to Fort Smith, Arkansas. The 10-cent stamp (Scott 35) was not original to the envelope. The original either fell off or was removed by a stamp collector.

tainous - and then wish for some more expressive words in the language... We kept traveling all day and night of course, our way through southern Arkansas being an extremely dusty, hilly and stoney road, as will appear when I state the fact that the first 14 miles took two hours. I had thought before I reached this point that the rough roads of Missouri and Arkansas could not be equalled, but here Arkansas fairly beats itself. Had not Mr. Crocker, an Overland Mail Line Superintendent, provided a most extra-ordinary team, I doubt whether we should have been able to cross the mountains in less than two days. The wiry, light little animals tugged and pulled as if they would tear themselves to pieces and our heavy wagon bounded along the crags as if it would be shaken in pieces every minute, and ourselves disemboweled on the spot."

Passenger Raphael Pumpelly, departing St. Louis on October 8, 1860, wrote:

"I secured a back seat in the overland coach, but the arrival of a woman and her brother obliged me to take the front seat. The unusually heavy mail in the boot, by weighing down the rear, kept those of us who were on the front seat constantly leaning forward, thus taking away all support for our backs. My immediate neighbor was a tall Missourian with his wife and two young daughters. The man was a Border Bully, armed with revolver, knife and rifle. The woman, a very hag, ever following the disgusting habit of dipping snuff - filling the air and covering her clothes with snuff spittle. The girls for several days overcome by seasickness, and in their vomiting had no regard for the clothes of their neighbors."

Did they use horses or mules?

Teams of four to six horses were used to pull the stages most of the way. However, due to difficult roads, teams of four mules were used between Fort Belle, Texas and Tucson, Arizona.

How many Butterfield employees traveled with each stage?

Each stage carried two, sometimes three employees. Typically, each crew had a 60-mile route and then a return for a total of 120 miles. Limited to this 60-mile stretch enabled the crew to be well familiar with their route, and able to traverse day or night. The conductor, riding to the driver's left, was the captain of the stage, having charge of the mail, passenger tickets and general operation of the stage. The "whip" as the driver was called (the reins were called ribbons) drove from the right hand side of the seat where a foot brake was provided. If trouble was expected, an armed guard rode beside the driver, typically packing a pair of six guns and a short shotgun loaded with buckshot.

One factor that helped Butterfield was the lack of interference from Indian tribes. In the *Arkansas Intelligencer's* April 23, 1858, report of the expedition that initially established the route, "The party consisting of eight men, came thru' from San Francisco in fifty-two days, meeting with no interruption from Indians on the route."

What about restroom facilities?

At the home station house, an outhouse was typically provided. At Potts Butterfield Home Station, an eight-hole outhouse was provided for the passengers and crew. At swing stations, or on the trail, the comfort station was no farther than the nearest bush.

On the rare trips when women were passengers, the driver would send the ladies to find a bush or tree on one side of the stage, and send the men to the other side of the stage. If the men's eyes wandered toward the other side of the stage during a comfort stop, one driver was quoted in a book by G.C. Tompkins as shouting, "Eyes this way boys, the ladies is pick'n' daisies."

How did the covers get to the gold fields?

An Arkansan named J. Rankin Pyeatte traveling to California seeking gold wrote home on December 9, 1849, wondering why he had received no letters from home. He engaged an express merchant to carry his mail to him – \$1 extra for each letter – in the gold fields 200 miles from San Francisco. His letter, reprinted in *Arkansas in the Gold Rush* by Priscilla McArthur, reads in part as follows:

Dear Companion, Children and Friends,

Having not heard a word from you since I left home, I have become very anxious to receive something from you. It would do me more good

than anything I could think of ... You may think you know how anxious I am to get a letter from you, but you know nothing about it, nor cannot know unless you were in the same situation that I am in, having been absent about 8 months and not having heard a word from you. I have no doubt but you have heard from us several times, for I have written six letters to you from different points. Why have I not gotten a letter I cannot tell unless they are directed to San Francisco.

This place is so far distant, 200 miles, from that, we can't get letters there.

We made arrangements with a merchant to lift our letters out of the post office there and bring to Sacramento City for one dollar extra on the letter.

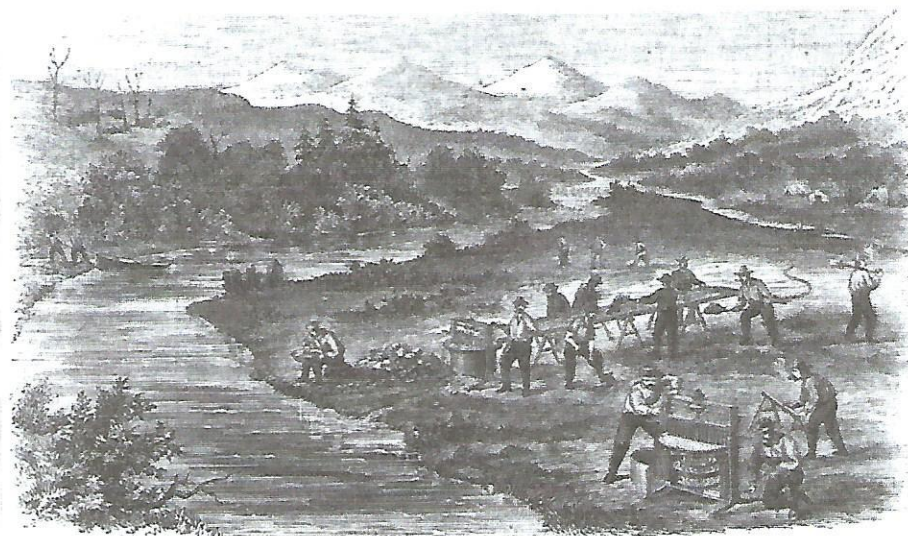
An engraving from around 1860 (Figure 10) depicts gold rush miners using the Nelson brand of gold washer in the mines of California.

Via Overland or Via Los Angeles

During the first 16 months of Butterfield's Overland Mail Co., the default transportation method for transcontinental mail was by steamship.

Twice a month steamships would leave New York City or New Orleans bound for Panama. At the Isthmus of Panama, letters, freight, and passengers were transported by wagon to the Pacific Ocean to await a second steamship bound for San Francisco. Senders preferring their letter to be carried over land, instead of by steamship, were required to place that directive on the face of the cover with words such as "Overland" or "Via Los Angeles."

On December 17, 1859, the postmaster general set Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. as the new default carrier for all transcontinental mail, instead of by steamship. This order was put into place in the latter half of January, greatly increasing the volume of mail transported over-



NELSON'S GOLD-WASHER AT WORK AT THE MINES.—[SEE PRECEDING PAGE.]

Figure 10. This engraving c. 1860 depicts gold rush miners using the Nelson brand of gold washer in the mines of California. (Courtesy of Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley).

land. As of late January 1860, all transcontinental mail was carried by the Butterfield, unless it had the directive "Via Panama" or "Via Steamship."

Shown (Figure 11) is one of the few surviving covers that were carried on the Fort Smith to Memphis leg of Butterfield's route.

The sender of this cover paid the 10 cents postage for a half-ounce letter traveling more than 3,000 miles. The sender wrote instructions to the postmaster in the upper left of the envelope: *Overland via Los Angeles*. Based on the postmark date of April 8, 1859, this cover departed San Francisco by stagecoach on Monday, April 11, 1859, arriving in Little Rock on May 6, where it was transferred to Butterfield's steamboat, *Jennie Whipple*, for the balance of the trip to Memphis. At Memphis, this cover was transferred to a mail steamboat headed south on the Mississippi River toward Natchez, Mississippi.

Figure 12 is another of the few Memphis route covers that have survived.

Starting in the spring of 1859, senders occasionally used preprinted envelopes with directives for the cover to be carried transcontinental by the Overland Mail Co. This example was printed by Hutchings & Rosenfield, 146 Montgomery St., San Francisco. Almost all of this type of preprinted envelopes were for eastbound mail.

This cover was mailed from Iowa City, California, postmarked July 14, 1859. The Iowa City postmaster stamped a circular "PAID 10" to indicate the sender paid the 10 cents postage for letters traveling 3,000 miles or more. Leaving Iowa City and traveling about 140 miles south to San Francisco, this cover boarded Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. stagecoach to Fort Smith, then on to Little Rock. Arriving in Little Rock, Arkansas about August 1 or 2, 1859, the letter departed on the Arkansas River steamboat *Jennie Whipple*, arriving at Memphis on August 5, 1859. From Memphis, the cover traveled another 400 miles due east to Philadelphia, Monroe County, Tennessee.

Not long ago, this cover (Figure 13) was in George Kramer's national telegraph exhibit. (Kramer has won the APS Champion of Champions prize, the highest honor for U.S. exhibiting, three times.)

According to Kramer, the Overland Mail Co. had an

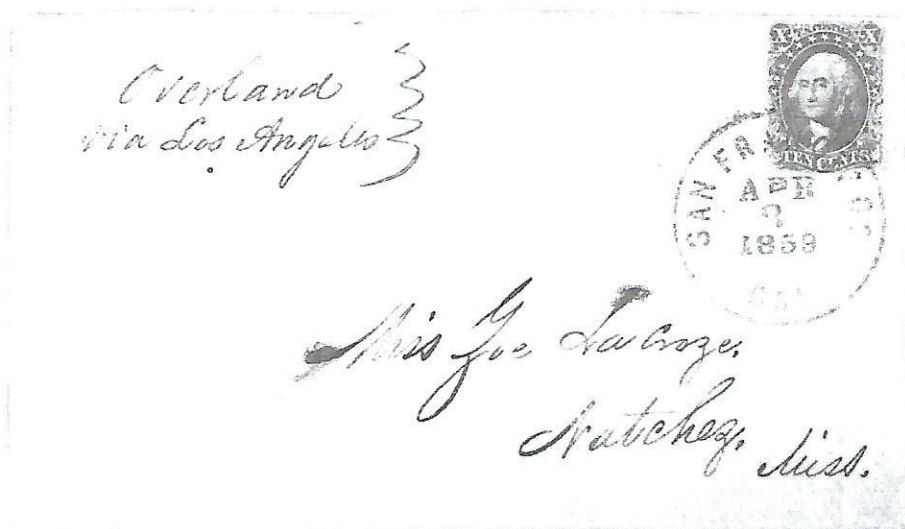


Figure 11. A rare surviving cover from the Fort Smith to Memphis leg of Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. route. The cover dated April 8, 1859 departed San Francisco by stagecoach on April 11, 1859, arrived in Little Rock, Arkansas on May 6 and was sent by steamboat to Memphis. From there, it rode another steamboat down the Mississippi River to Natchez, Mississippi.



Figure 12. This cover went eastbound from California to Tennessee via the Butterfield transports, first by stagecoach and then steamboat on the Arkansas and Mississippi rivers. The 10 cents postage paid for letters traveling 3,000 miles or more.

arrangement with National Telegraph whereby the sender could have its message telegraphed eastward if the preprinted envelope, like this one, was used. When this cover arrived in St. Louis, it was immediately transferred to the National Telegraph office, where the message it contained continued its journey by wire, saving about three days when compared to the mail train from St. Louis to the East. The stamp shown on the cover did not originate with it, according to the APS expertizing committee.

Figure 14 shows one of the first pieces carried eastbound by Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. Postmarked on November 19, 1858, when the Overland was only 60 days old, this cover was carried by stagecoach from San Francisco on Monday, November 21, 1858, to Fort Smith, then scheduled to arrive in Tipton, Missouri on December 23. At Tipton, it transferred to a train toward its destination in Dorchester,

Massachusetts.

This cover is addressed to Miss Hollie L. Wales of Dorchester, Massachusetts – a distance of more than 3,000 miles from San Francisco, requiring postage of 10 cents. Miss Wales was most likely a girlfriend or sister of one of the Gold Rush 49ers. Across the top, the sender wrote: “Per Southern Overland Mail via Los Angeles,” indicating the sender did not want it to be carried by ocean steamship via Panama, nor by one of the northern route mail stagecoach lines through Salt Lake City.

The next letter (Figure 15) was mailed from St. Louis on March 7, 1860, to Jacksboro in north-central Texas.

Jacksboro was located on the Butterfield Overland Mail route. Regular postal service began at Jacksboro in 1859. Since this letter was traveling less than 3,000 miles, only 3 cents of postage was required. The envelope was roughly opened along the right edge, but the tear did not affect the stamp affixed. The sender used an envelope preprinted by Lynde Bushnell, a bookseller and stationer.

There is a contemporaneous manuscript notation at the bottom left requesting it be carried “Via Overland Mail.” This envelope is addressed to the early Jack County pioneer, D.B.J. Sterrets, Esq. in Jacksboro, Texas.

Most of the mailbags carried by the Overland Mail Co. were locked, however the bag for destinations along the route was left unlocked so the conductor could deliver and receive mail at the various stations along the 3,000-mile route.

A letter mailed May 5, 1860, from San Francisco had a destination of Ireland (Figure 16). The sender paid 19 cents as indicated in the upper right.

Shown (Figure 17) is one of just a handful of Hawaii via Butterfield Overland covers that have survived.

This letter was postmarked on November 26, 1860 in Honolulu, addressed to Judson Shute, of Boston, Massachusetts. This letter was carried by ship to San Francisco on December 21. According to the Honolulu paper, *The Pacific Commercial*, the only mail ship departing for San Francisco between Nov. 26 and Dec. 20 was the *Francis Palmer*, departing on Dec. 8. Typically, it took about 12 days to sail to San Francisco.

Departing Dec. 8 from Hawaii, it was postmarked 13 days later in San Francisco after the ship arrived. This letter was held at the San Francisco Post Office over the weekend, and placed in a mailbag departing on Butterfield’s Overland Mail stage on December 24 for a 24-day trip to St. Louis, scheduled to arrive on January 17, 1861. The letter contin-

Via Los Angeles, Overland.

CHAS. J. OSBORN,
NATIONAL TELEGRAPH OFFICE,
ST. LOUIS,
MISSOURI.

Figure 13. The Overland Mail Co. had an arrangement with National Telegraph whereby the sender could have a message telegraphed eastward once the stagecoach reached St. Louis if a preprinted envelope like this one was used.

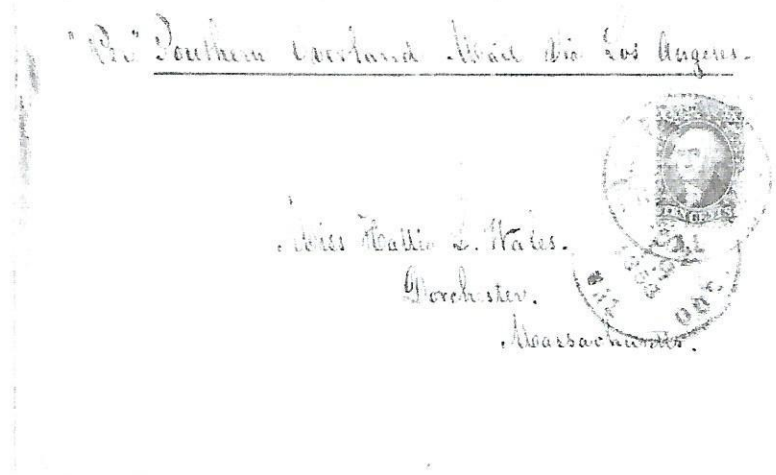


Figure 14. Postmarked Nov. 19, 1858, this is one of the first covers carried eastbound by the Butterfield Overland Mail Co. The cover was carried by stagecoach from San Francisco November 21 to Fort Smith, Arkansas, scheduled to arrive in Tipton, Missouri on December 23. At Tipton, it transferred to a train toward its destination in Dorchester, Massachusetts.

ued eastbound on a train for delivery to the Boston Post Office to wait for Shute to call for his mail.

The large “12” in the San Francisco postmark indicates that the recipient needed to pay the 12 cents due: 10 cents for the transcontinental rate and 2 cents for the ship fee.

Next (Figure 18) is one of the few covers carried by Butterfield’s Overland Mail Co. whose 10 cents postage was paid with four stamps instead of one 10-cent postage stamp. No designation of “via overland” or “via Los Angeles” was needed since Butterfield was now the default carrier of all transcontinental mail. Edward Huntington mailed this letter on November 2, 1860, from Rome, New York to Henry W. Coe of San Jose, California. The envelope contains Edwards’ additional letters to Coe, dated December 3, 1858 and April 4, 1859.

The Figure 19 cover was mailed June 11, 1860, from Baton Rouge, Louisiana and is franked with a 3 cents postage. This is another example of the few surviving Memphis route covers. Postmaster J. McCormick marked the cover “Due

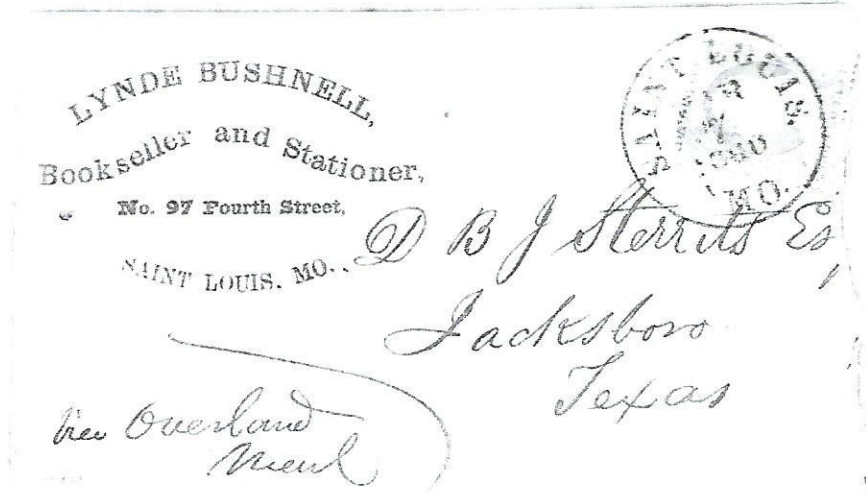


Figure 15. This letter was mailed March 7, 1860 in St. Louis and bound for Jacksboro, Texas, a destination of less than 3,000 miles so only 3 cents in postage was needed. A contemporaneous manuscript at the bottom left requests that the letter be carried "Via Overland Mail."

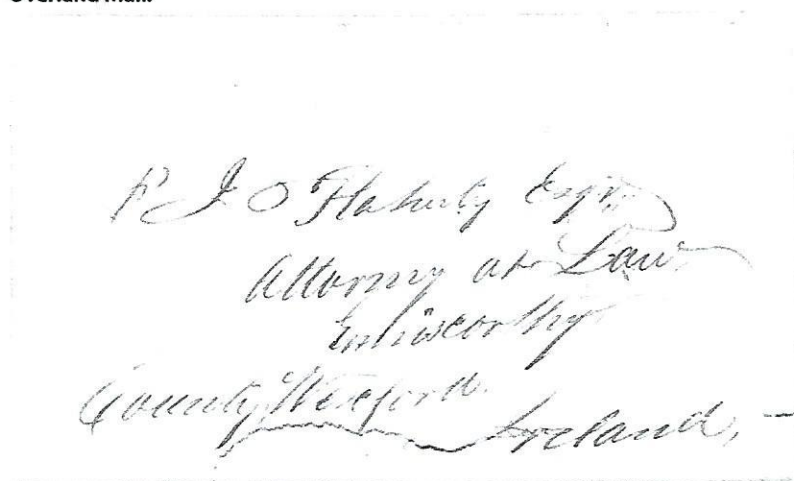


Figure 16. This letter mailed in 1860 went eastbound from San Francisco bound to Ireland via Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. The sender paid 19 cents to accomplish the long journey.

7" because the correct postage for distances 3,000 miles or more was 10 cents. The recipient had to pay 7 cents when picking up this mail at the Santa Rosa, California post office.

The cover traveled by steamboat north to Memphis and departed June 14 or 18 on the Overland Mail. Aboard Memphis' Mississippi River ferry to Hopefield, the cover was transferred to the train. After a 24-mile trip, at Madison the cover was transferred to a stagecoach headed westward toward Fort Smith, arriving at San Francisco about July 12. We know the cover was carried by Butterfield's stagecoaches across Arkansas because his steamboat, *Jennie Whipple*, was stuck aground that entire summer.

Arriving in San Francisco, the cover left the care of the Overland Mail Co., and was carried by wagon north about 60 miles to the Santa Rosa.

Why did the southern Butterfield Overland Stage end in March 1861?

The Act of Congress of March 2, 1861, the Post Office Appropriation Bill, ended the southern Overland Mail

Route. The last Butterfield Overland stagecoach left St. Louis on March 18, 1861, collected several additional bags at Tucson, and arrived at San Francisco on April 6, 1861. The primary reason for ending the southern route was the beginning of the Civil War.

The Overland still moved the mail westward

The Post Office Appropriation Bill also provided that the original six-year contract be continued for the balance of the term and increased from \$600,000 to \$1 million per year on the central route, beginning July 1, 1861. The new route would have daily mail stagecoaches Tuesday to Sunday, and a Pony Express semiweekly of 10 days for eight months and 12 days for the four winter months. This bill also provided that the Pony Express would discontinue upon completion of the transcontinental telegraph.

On March 16, 1861, the Overland Mail Co. sub-contracted the Pony Express route from St. Joseph to Sacramento (the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Co. had already been operating the Pony Express since April 3, 1860); and the stagecoach route from Atchison, Kansas to Salt Lake City to the COC & PP Ex. Co. to receive the sum of \$475,000 per year. The Overland Mail Co. would operate from Salt Lake City to Placerville as the new western terminus for the \$525,000 balance of the \$1 million annual sum. The Pioneer State Co. already had a contract to carry the mail from Placerville to Sacramento.

By this time, board member John Butterfield had been replaced as board president by William Dinsmore. However, the Overland Mail Co. was still frequently referred to as "The Butterfield." An example of this is found in the June 11, 1861, *Sacramento Daily Union*, which refers to "the Butterfield new route" and "the Butterfield Company."

Map 2 shows the lower southern route of Butterfield's Overland Mail (in green), and also the northern route Butterfield began using in spring of 1861, avoiding all of the southern states.

A rare surviving lettersheet that took the northern route in 1863 (Figure 20) from San Francisco to Cognac, France is shown. This piece was mailed October 5 from the San Francisco Post Office, and received a double circle postmark. It was carried by the Overland Mail Co. to Atchison, Kansas or Saint Joseph, Missouri, where it was transferred from stagecoach to a train.

This cover arrived in New York, and received a second postmark on the front, "New York, Oct. 27." Departing New York port by steamship, it arrived in France at the port of

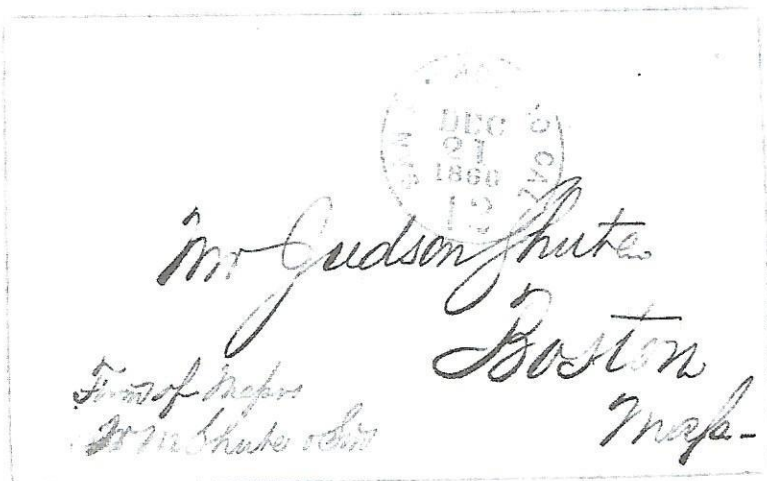


Figure 17. This Honolulu-to-Boston cover that straddles a new year is one of just a handful of Hawaii covers that have survived. The letter was postmarked November 26, 1860 in Honolulu, left Hawaii on December 8 and arrived January 17 in St. Louis before it was sent along to Boston.

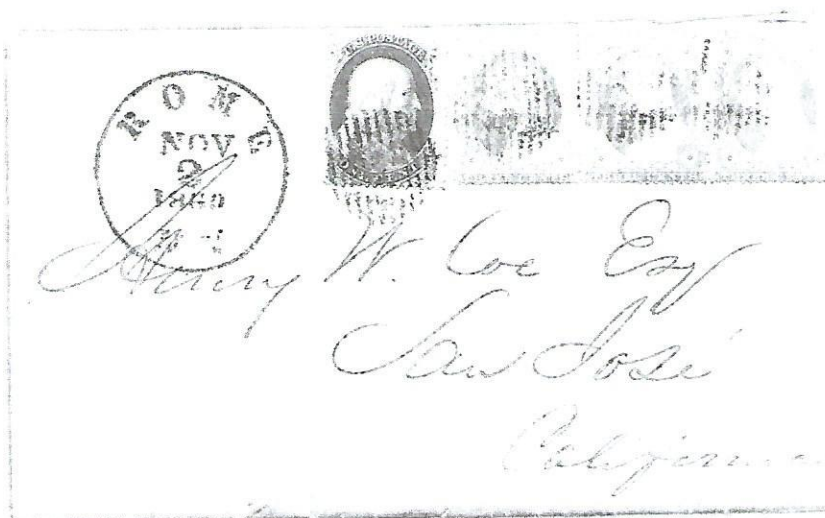


Figure 18. This cover sent from Rome, New York is one of the few covers carried by Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. whose 10 cents postage was paid with four stamps instead of a single 10-cent stamp.



Figure 19. This is one of just a handful of Memphis route covers that have survived. This cover was mailed June 11, 1860 from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, franked with a 3-cent dull red Washington (Scott 26). At the top middle of the cover, the postmaster marked "Due 7" because the rate for traveling more than 3,000 miles was 10 cents.

Calais, receiving on the front a red double-circle postmark on November 11, 1863. In Paris, it received two double circled postmarks on the reverse side dated "Nov. 11, 1863." From Paris it was transported to Cognac, where it received its final double postmark on the reverse on November 12, 1863.

A westbound cover from Michigan to the Nevada Territory (Figure 21) also took the northern route during the Civil War. This cover was mailed June 6, 1863, by C&A Ives Co. from Detroit and sent to Butler Ives at Carson City, Nevada Territory.

Ives was hired by the Nevada Territorial Surveyor General on July 15, 1861, to engage in surveying the disputed boundary between the Nevada Territory and California.

The final item shown (Figure 22) is one of the last surviving Butterfield covers. It was mailed May 3, 1864, about 100 days before the Overland Mail Co. contract ended in September 1864. On March 3, 1863, the postal rate was dropped to 3 cents for a half-ounce letter. Postmarked in San Francisco, this cover was carried northeast by the Pioneer State Stage Line to Placerville, where it was transferred to Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. It was carried to Atchison, Kansas to meet the train for St. Joseph. The cover most likely traveled by steamboat on the Mississippi River from St. Joseph to Memphis.

At the time C.W. Christy received this letter, he was superintendent and relief agent of Soldier's Lodge. In the 1864 issue of *The Sanitary Reporter*, Christy reported that the Soldier's Lodge in Memphis serviced 1,420 soldiers, served 4,802 meals, and furnished 1,324 nights lodging for soldiers.

When the first transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869 it followed much of the original stagecoach route. The train passengers traveled on an almost parallel route to the trail, yet they were able to travel cheaper and faster than the old stagecoach lines.

This ended a brief but fascinating season of postal history.

Resources

Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. Stagecoach Trail Across Arkansas 1858-1861 (2021), by Bob Crossman.

Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. as Reported in Arkansas Newspapers of 1858-1861 (2022), by Bob Crossman.

Butterfield's Overland Mail Co. Use of Steamboats Across Arkansas 1858-1861 (2022), by Bob Crossman.

Mails of the Westward Expansion, 1803 to 1861 (2015), by Steven C. Walske and Richard C. Frajola, Western Cover Society.

"Butterfield Stables Sold," *Oswego Weekly Palladium*, Oswego, NY, June 13, 1894, p. 1.
 Nita Stewart Haley Memorial Library, Midland, Texas.
 Margaret Motley, Chair, Pope County Historical Foundation-Potts House Museum, Pottsville, Arkansas.
900 Miles on the Butterfield Trail (2006), by A.C. Greene, University of North Texas Press, Denton, Texas.
San Francisco Bulletin, June 13, 1859.
Encyclopedia of Arkansas, <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/>.
Arkansas in the Gold Rush (1986), by Priscilla McArthur, UNKNO, pp. 188-189.
The Observer Dispatch, Utica, New York, March 1, 1981, page 2B.
San Francisco Evening Bulletin, from our Special Overland Correspondent, Fort Smith, Arkansas, November 25, 1858. Reprinted in *The First Overland Mail: Butterfield Trail*, Vol. 2, by Walter B. Lang; page 43.
Travels and Adventures of Raphael Pumpelly, by Raphael Pumpelly, New York Henry Holt and Company, 1920. Page 113.
New York Herald, Sunday, Oct. 24, 1858. "Our Special Overland Correspondence, near Fort Belknap, Texas," Sept. 22, 1858.
A Compendium of The Overland Mail Company on the South Route 1858-1861 (1985) by G.C. Tompkins. G.T. Co., El Paso, Texas. Page 140.



Figure 20. This lettersheet with multiple postal markings traveled by stage – the Overland northern route – train and ship in 1863. It left San Francisco on Oct. 5, 1863 and arrived on Nov. 12, 1863 in Cognac, France, where it was delivered to Arbourn-Marette & Co.

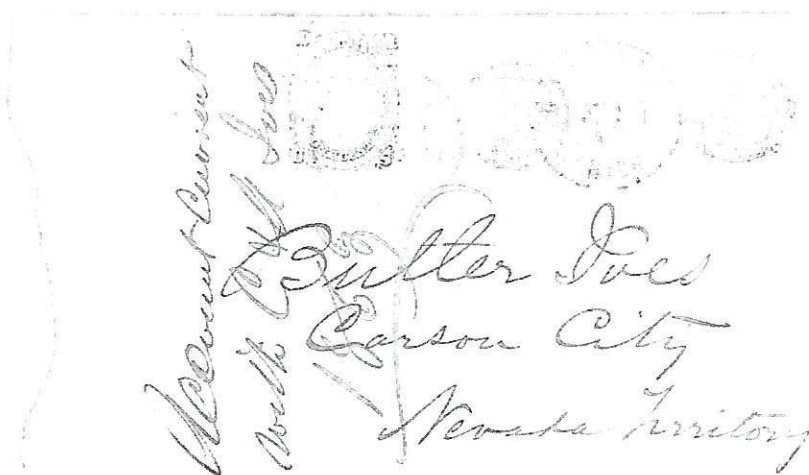


Figure 21. This cover sent June 16, 1863 from Detroit, Michigan to Nevada Territory carried 10 cents in postage with a 1-cent and three 3-cent stamps. The recipient, Butler Ives, was hired two years earlier by the Nevada Territorial Surveyor General

The Author

Twenty years ago, Bob Crossman's wife said, "You need a hobby. It's not healthy to work 24 hours a day." So he rescued his grandfather's, fathers, and his own Boy Scout stamp collections from the garage. Over the years on business trips, Bob has frequented retail stamp stores and stamp shows across the country, concentrating on classic U.S., Arkansas postal history, Butterfield Mail stage and Arkansas revenue stamps.

Much of the text here comes from previous articles and three books he has written about the Butterfield Overland Mail's operations in his home state of Arkansas. He is a member of several philatelic organizations including the American Philatelic Society, State Revenue Society, the Postal History Foundation of Tucson and U.S. Philatelic Classics Society, along with the Arkansas Historical Association. Dr. Crossman may be contacted at bcrossman@arumc.org or at 8 Sternwheel Drive, Conway, AR 72034.

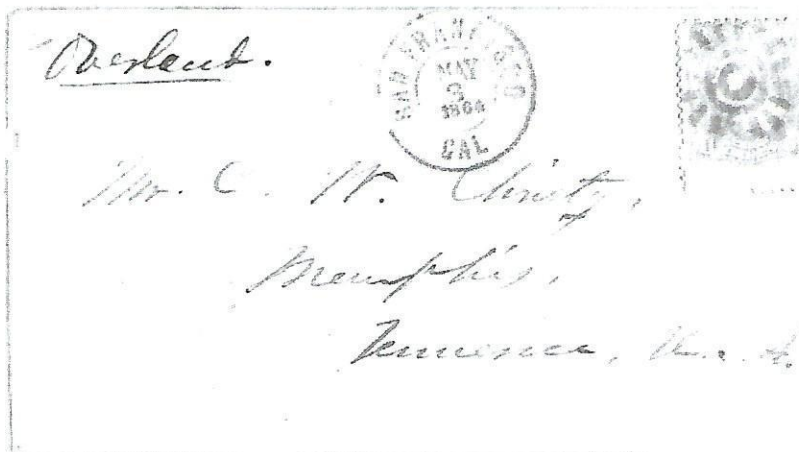


Figure 22. One of the last Butterfield covers, this item was mailed May 3, 1864, about 100 days before the Overland Mail Co. contract ended.