

Overland via Stoughton

Chapter Ten

Santa Fe Contract Mail, 1850-1861

The United States had a long-standing interest in the American southwest, culminating with the August 18, 1846 occupation of Santa Fe, New Mexico by American forces under General Stephen Kearny during the Mexican-American War. The presence of troops in Santa Fe created the need for private mail services between Santa Fe and Missouri (described in Chapter Two), which laid the foundation for the later post office contract mails along the Santa Fe trail. This chapter describes those contract mail services.

The February 2, 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War, ceded New Mexico to the United States. Anticipating this, a March 3, 1847 Congressional Act authorized a contract mail route between Independence, Missouri and Santa Fe via Bent's Fort, although the Post Office Department waited three years before advertising for contractors. In the interim, the Post Office established a post office at Santa Fe on October 1, 1849 even though there were no contract routes to service it.

Figure 10-1 illustrates the Santa Fe contract mail route. As described in Chapter Two, this route originally touched at Bent's Fort and served as a commercial and military route for decades. The Cimarron Cutoff



Figure 10-1. Map of the Santa Fe mail route, showing the intermediate stop at Bent's Fort and the Cimarron Cutoff, which shortened the route.

was a shorter route over less mountainous terrain that was used by the contract mail services described in this chapter. The contract mails between Santa Fe and Independence will be covered in chronological order, and then two less significant mail contracts that used the Santa Fe Trail for a portion of their routes will be described. Table 10-1 summarizes these contracts.

Table 10-1 – Mail Contracts using the Santa Fe Trail, 1850-1861

Dates of Operation	Contractor	Route #	Terminus	Contract
To/from Santa Fe				
Jul 1, 1850 to Jun 30, 1854	Waldo, Hall	4888	Independence	Monthly in 29 days
Jul 1, 1854 to Jun 30, 1857	Hall/Hockaday	8912	Independence	Monthly in 25 days
Jul 1, 1857 to Jun 30, 1858	Hall/Hockaday	8912	Independence	Twice-monthly in 25 days
Jul 1, 1858 to Aug 22, 1859	Hall & Porter	10532	Independence	Weekly in 20 days
Aug 29, 1859 to Jun 30, 1862	Hall & Porter	10532	Independence	Weekly in 15 days
To/from Albuquerque				
Oct 16, 1858 to Jun 30, 1859	Bowler/Green	10615	Neosho	Monthly in 25 days
To/from Stockton, Calif				
Oct 1, 1858 to Jun 30, 1859	Hall	15050	Kansas City	Monthly in 60 days

The First Mail Contract between Santa Fe and Independence, 1850 to 1854

Although authorized to implement a contract mail route by the March 3, 1847 Act, the post office waited until the spring of 1850 to advertise for proposals. Waldo, Hall & Company of Independence was the winning bidder for contract route 4888 between Santa Fe and Independence, and signed a four-year contract on May 11, 1850. Trips were monthly in 29 days each way, with service to begin on July 1, 1850.

Departures were scheduled for the first of each month at 8am from each terminus of the line. The first trip left Independence as scheduled on July 1, 1850 and arrived in Santa Fe about 28 days later. It turned around quickly, and left Santa Fe on August 1, for a 28 day trip to Independence. Next, a heavy mail left Independence on September 1 and reached Santa Fe on September 24. Starting October 1, simultaneous departures were made from each terminus. Service was very reliable, in spite of continual harassment by Indian war parties. The July 1850 *Missouri Commonwealth* of Independence explained why:

The stages are got up in elegant style, and are each arranged to convey eight passengers. The bodies are beautifully painted and made water-tight, with a view of using them as boats in ferrying streams. The team consists of six mules to each coach. The mail is guarded by eight men, armed as follows: Each man has at his side, fastened in the stage, one of Colt's revolving rifles, in a holster below one of Colt's long revolvers, and in his belt a small Colt's revolver, besides a hunting knife; so that these eight men are ready, in case of attack, to discharge 136 shots without having to reload. This is equal to a small army armed as in the ancient times, and from the looks of this escort, ready as they are either for offensive or defensive warfare with the savages, we have no fears for the safety of the mails. The accommodating contractors have established a sort of base of refitting at Council Grove, a distance of 150 miles from this city, and have sent out a blacksmith, and a number of men to cut and cure hay, with a quantity of animals, grain, and provisions; and we understand they intend to make a sort of traveling station there, and to commence a farm. They also, we believe, intend to make a similar settlement at Walnut Creek next season. Two of their stages will start from here the first of every month.

The citizens of Santa Fe soon agitated for a more frequent service. They sent a petition to the Postmaster General on February 5, 1851 expressing satisfaction with the existing service but requesting a semi-monthly mail between Santa Fe and Independence:

The undersigned, Petitioners, Citizens of New Mexico, would respectfully represent to your Honor, that, on the first day of July last, a monthly mail was established between Independence, in the State of Missouri, and Santa Fe, in the Territory of New Mexico; that the enterprise, energy, and untiring perseverance of the Contractors, up to this time, have delivered this mail, both at Independence and this place, with a punctuality not excelled, if equaled, by that of other Contractors in the United States...all demand the establishment of, at least, a SEMI-MONTHLY MAIL between Independence and Santa Fe.

The Post Office Department would wait six years before acting on this request.

An early letter carried on route 4888 is illustrated in Figure 10-2. This unpaid letter was postmarked at Santa Fe¹ on March 1, 1851 to correspond with the departure of the seventh contract stagecoach trip to Independence. It was rated 10 cents due for the over 300 miles rate to Waterford, NY.



Figure 10-2. Letter postmarked in Santa Fe on March 1, 1851 and carried on route 4888 to Independence, Missouri.

It is from Major Oliver Lathrop Shepherd, who was stationed at Fort Marcy in Santa Fe. Fort Marcy was a defensive structure constructed by Kearny's Army of the West in August 1846 to consolidate its occupation of Santa Fe. Shepherd was later appointed Lieutenant-Colonel of the U.S. 18th Infantry in the Army of the Ohio during the Civil War. He was brevetted to Major General in 1865 for his gallant services at the battle of Stone's River.

Santa Fe used a manuscript postmark in the same period as the datestamp illustrated in Figure 10-2. Figure 10-3 shows the latest known use of the manuscript postmark.

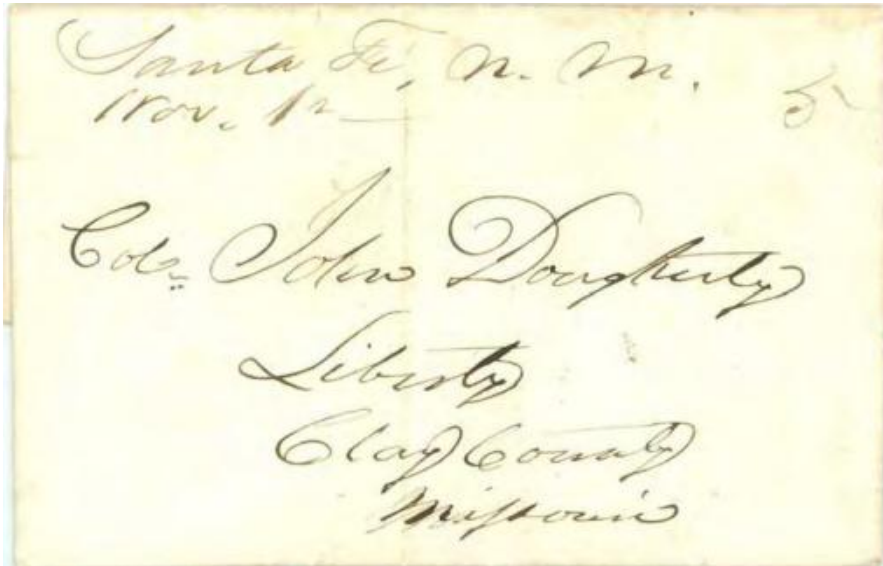


Figure 10-3. Letter postmarked in Santa Fe on November 1, 1851 and carried on route 4888 to Independence.

This letter was datelined “Santa Fe 31 Oct 1851” by Abraham Woolley, an Indian Agent in the New Mexico Territory. It was rated for five cents due and postmarked in manuscript for the November 1 departure of the 15th contract stagecoach from Santa Fe. The stage arrived in Independence around October 30, and the letter was delivered to nearby Liberty.

Eastbound letters carried on route 4888 are uncommon, but letters sent to Santa Fe during this period are particularly elusive. Figure 10-4 shows an example addressed to Dr. Samuel Woodhouse, surgeon and



Figure 10-4. Letter postmarked in Jerseyville, Illinois on March 20, 1851 and carried on route 4888 to Santa Fe.

naturalist attached to Captain Lorenzo Sitgreaves' 1851 scientific and military expedition to explore the Zuni and Colorado Rivers. The expedition set out from Santa Fe on August 15, 1851 and proceeded west via the Zuni Pueblo to Fort Yuma, California. Along the way, they were attacked by hostile Mohave Indians, and Dr. Woodhouse was wounded in the leg.

This unpaid letter was posted in Jerseyville, Illinois on March 20, 1851 and rated 10 cents due for the over 300 miles rate to Santa Fe. The largely personal letter was directed to the, "Capt. Sitgreaves exploring party" at Santa Fe, Texas. The incorrect Texas directive was crossed out, and it was carried on the April 1 stagecoach from Missouri to Santa Fe.

Much of the mail from Santa Fe in this period was from military personnel stationed there. Figure 10-5 shows a May 1852 letter endorsed "Official Business."

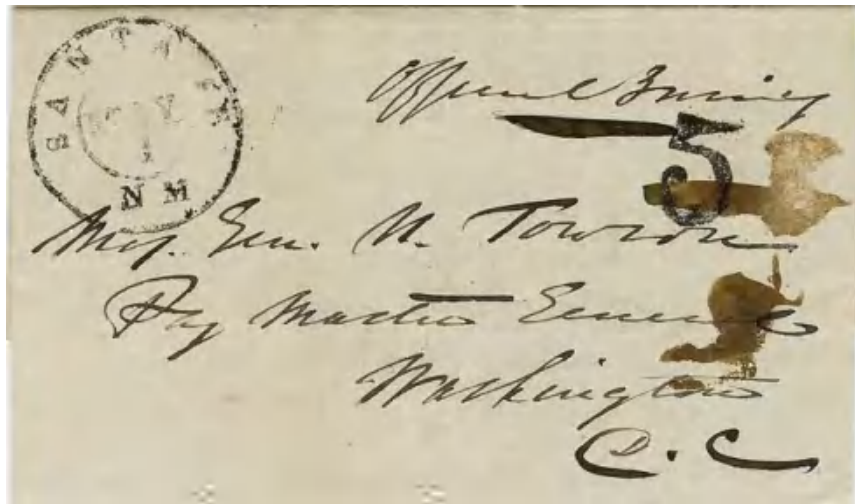


Figure 10-5. Letter postmarked in Santa Fe on May 1, 1852 and carried on route 4888 to Independence.

This unpaid letter was postmarked at Santa Fe² on May 1, 1852 to correspond with the departure date for the 20th contract stagecoach trip to Independence. It was rated for five cents due,³ but this was later crossed out in recognition of the free frank for official correspondence.

It is from Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Horace Brooks to Major General Towson, Paymaster General at Washington. Brooks graduated from West Point in 1835, and served with distinction with the 2nd Artillery Regiment during the Second Seminole War, and in the Mexican-American War. He later served as Colonel of the 4th U.S. Artillery Regiment in the Civil War.

The Second Mail Contract between Santa Fe and Independence, 1854-1858

The Waldo, Hall & Company contract for route 4888 expired on June 30, 1854. The post office reduced the contractual trip time to 25 days, re-numbered the route to 8912, and granted a four-year monthly mail contract to Jacob Hall and John Hockaday, effective July 1, 1854. Departures were still on the first of each month, but the post office retained an option to increase the trips to twice-monthly at twice the compensation.

Despite the regularity of the line, not much mail is known from this period. Figure 10-6 shows a letter postmarked at Santa Fe⁴ on September 1, 1856 for the departure of the stagecoach for Independence. It



Figure 10-6. Letter postmarked in Santa Fe on September 1, 1856 and carried on route 8912 to Independence, Missouri.

was prepaid 21 cents⁵ for the American packet rate via England to France. Postmarked “New York Am Pkt” on October 4 for the departure of the American Ocean Line steamer *Washington*, it arrived in Southampton, England on October 18. By the time it reached Calais, France, it had been accidentally combined with the October 8 British packet mail from Boston and received an “Etats-Unis Paq. Br. Calais” (British packet from the United States) French entry marking on October 19. Consequently, 13 décimes⁶ British packet postage due was assessed.

The option to increase the frequency of trips was exercised on July 1, 1857 so departures were twice-monthly after that date, leaving on the 1st and the 15th of each month. The Hall-Hockaday contract expired a year later, on June 30, 1858.

The Third Mail Contract between Santa Fe and Independence, 1858-1862

The post office decided to increase the frequency on the Santa Fe - Independence route to weekly and re-numbered it as Route 10532. Trips were to be made in 20 days, leaving every Monday at 8am from each terminus. On April 24, 1858 a contract was signed with Hall & Porter, effective July 1. Figure 10-7 shows a letter carried under this contract.

This cover was postmarked at Santa Fe⁷ for the Monday, August 9, 1858 for the weekly stagecoach departure to Independence, where it arrived around August 29. The letter was prepaid the double-weight French mail rate by a strip of three 10 cents stamps.⁸ It was postmarked on September 4 in New York to coincide with the sailing of the Vanderbilt Line’s *Ariel*, which arrived in Le Havre on September 19.

Starting Monday, August 29, 1859 Hall & Porter implemented a 15-day schedule in response to a Post Office Department order. They then sold their stagecoaches and livestock to the Missouri Stage Company on December 23, 1860. After that date, the Missouri Stage Co. fulfilled the mail contract for route 10532 under subcontract to Hall & Porter.



Figure 10-7. Letter postmarked in Santa Fe on August 9, 1858 and carried on route 10532 to Independence.

Figure 10-8 shows a letter carried by the Missouri Stage Company. This letter was written by U.S. army surgeon Charles H. Alden, who stopped at Santa Fe on his way from Fort Garland (in today's Colorado) to Mesilla, New Mexico where he was captured along with much of the U.S. 7th Infantry by Confederate forces on July 27, 1861. The letter was prepaid three cents and postmarked in Santa Fe on Monday, May 27, 1861 for the departure of the weekly stagecoach to Independence.

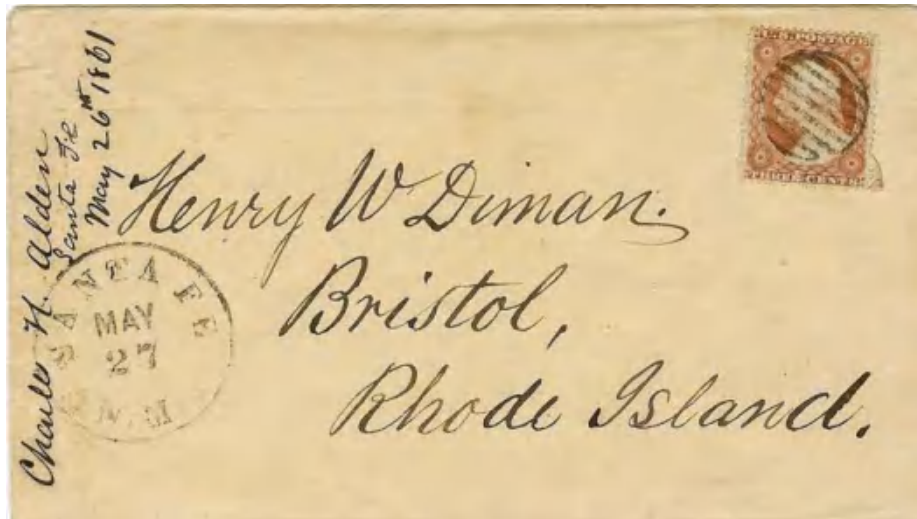


Figure 10-8. Letter postmarked in Santa Fe on May 27, 1861 and carried on route 10532 to Independence.

Contract Mail between Neosho and Albuquerque, 1858-59

On August 3, 1854 Congress approved a mail route between Neosho, Missouri and Albuquerque, New Mexico. The Post Office Department, however, wisely waited for four years to act on this authorization. On May 27, 1858 they signed a four-year contract for mail route 10615 with Thomas Bowler (of Santa Fe)

and Frank Green for a monthly mail using Beale's wagon route along the Canadian River. Trips in 25 days were to leave on the 15th of each month and arrive on the 10th of the following month, with service to start between October 1 and November 1. A map of contract route number 10615 is shown in Figure 10-9.



Lt. (USN) Edward Fitzgerald Beale, 1822-1893

- Graduated from Naval Academy in 1842
- Sailed to California with Admiral Stockton, 1846
- Rescued Kearny at San Pasqual battle in 1847
- Crossed Panama to U.S. with gold samples in 1848
- Appointed to survey Beale's wagon route in 1857
- Ambassador to Austria-Hungary in 1876

Service began normally with the first westbound departure from Neosho on October 16, 1858. This mail accompanied Lieutenant Beale's military detachment for safety, and arrived in Santa Fe on January 2 before continuing on to Albuquerque. Washington's *Daily Globe* of January 25, 1859 ominously reported signs of impending Indian hostilities:

The Neosho mail arrived at Santa Fe on the 2d, having been detained by the slow movements of Lieutenant Beale's party. They met no hostile Indians, but signs of an approaching outbreak were daily visible. They were evidently only deterred by the strength of the mail company's force.



Figure 10-9. Map of contract mail route 10615 between Albuquerque, New Mexico Territory and Neosho, Missouri.

The first eastbound mail from Albuquerque departed on October 17, 1858. It made relatively good time, arriving in Neosho on November 17, although it was attacked, as reported in the December 3 New York *Herald*:

St. Louis, Dec. 2, 1858

The first daily mail from Albuquerque, New Mexico, arrived at Neosho, Missouri, on the 17th ult., thirty-one days out. The mail was intercepted by a war party of Kiowa Indians, but a shot from the mail party, wounding the principal chief, put them to flight.

The second Albuquerque mail left on November 15 and met with disaster. A correspondent for the *Kansas Journal of Commerce* reported from Santa Fe on November 21, 1858 that:

Major Wells, connected with the stage line, arrived here this morning from on the Neosho mail route, having deemed it unsafe to proceed with the mail, after hearing of that deplorable disaster which, he informs me, occurred to the last outgoing mail party. It seems that the party which left Albuquerque on the 15th instant, for Neosho, had some of their animals stolen by the Indians, the Comanches, of the Plains, which the party, however, pursued and recovered. The Indians thereupon largely reinforced themselves and attacked the mail party, which after several repulses, they eventually succeeded in overpowering. *The entire party was massacred, and all the outfit, including the mail, was destroyed.*

However, not all of the party were killed, as was later reported on March 13, 1859 from St. Louis.¹⁰

The loss of the Neosho and Albuquerque mail of last November, is confirmed by the arrival here of John Hall, the conductor, who makes affidavit to the effect that when about two days' march behind Lieut. Beale's party, he was attacked by forty Comanches, badly wounded and taken prisoner. The mail was destroyed. Hall escaped from the Indians in February, and, after enduring great hardships, succeeded in reaching the settlements in safety.

The Wells report suggests that the November 15 mail from Neosho was turned back for safety. There are no further reports of mails on route 10615, and the Postmaster General reported only \$320 in postal receipts for 1858-59. Accordingly, he notified Bowler on May 17, 1859 that the contract for route 10615 was terminated, effective July 1. No letters carried on this route are known to have survived.

Contract Mail between Kansas City and Stockton, 1858-59

On March 3, 1855 Congress authorized a mail route between Independence, Missouri and Stockton, California via Albuquerque. Three years later, the Post Office Department signed a four-year contract for mail route 15050 with Jacob Hall on May 28, 1858. The contract called for a monthly mail between Kansas City, Missouri and Stockton via Santa Fe and Albuquerque in 60 days. Service was to start on October 1. Figure 10-10 shows the map of route 15050.



Figure 10-10. Map of contract mail route 15050 between Stockton, California and Kansas City, Missouri via Santa Fe and Albuquerque.

Hall transferred this contract to Barrow, Porter & Crenshaw on August 14, 1858. Hall and Porter were no strangers, since they were partners on the third Independence-Santa Fe mail contract, as described above. This allowed them to be aggressive in pursuing the contract for route 15050, since they already had a stagecoach service operating on the segment between Missouri and Santa Fe.

The September 5, 1858 *Kansas City Journal*¹¹ grandly reported the departure of the stocking trip for Barrow, Porter & Crenshaw's "Great Central Mail Line" as follows:

OVERLAND ROUTE TO STOCKTON. – The first train of the Great Central Mail Line, Barrow, Porter & Co., proprietors, from Kansas City to California, left yesterday. It consisted of twelve wagons, one hundred mules and twenty-five men. The coaches, with one hundred more mules, and an additional force of twenty-five men, will follow in a few days.

These advance parties are sent out to fix the stations and provide accommodations for the regular mail train, which leaves this city on the first of October. The whole station equipment, when organized, will be the most extensive on the American continent... Thus has this great central route, at once taken the precedence of all others as the overland route to California, not only for the mails, but for all the purposes of trade, traffic and commerce.

Westbound service began as scheduled on October 1, 1858 from Kansas City. After a rapid 54-day trip, the mail arrived in Stockton, California on November 24.¹² The first eastbound mail party did not fare as well. Departing from Stockton with 50-60 letters on November 1, they encountered hostile Indians north of Los Angeles, and took shelter in nearby Fort Tejon. They met the first westbound party there and returned to Stockton on November 24. The first successful eastbound mail arrived in Kansas City on March 1, 1859.¹³ This must have been the mail party that departed from Stockton on January 1.

The second and last successful westbound mail left Kansas City on April 1, 1859 and arrived at Stockton on May 29. Along the way, they encountered the eastbound mail party, which reached Santa Fe on May 2.¹⁴ This must have been the mail that left Stockton on April 1. The final eastbound mail left Stockton on June 1 and arrived at Kansas City on July 23,¹⁵ in a rapid 53 days.

In announcing the May 11, 1859 termination of the "Kansas and Stockton Mail" in his 1859 report, the Postmaster General stated that:

During the period of nine months that it was in operation, there were but four arrivals of through mails at Kansas, and but two at Stockton. The whole mail matter received at Kansas from Stockton consisted of two letters and twenty-six newspapers while it appears, from the returns, that but a single letter reached Stockton from Kansas.

He also reported that total receipts of \$1,255 arose mainly from letters carried over partial sections of the route. The termination was effective on July 1, 1859.

The Postmaster General's report identified a total of six successful trips by the line. The two westbound trips were confirmed by newspaper reports, but only three¹⁶ of the four successful eastbound trips were reported. The fourth successful eastbound trip must have left Stockton on February 1, 1859. This is confirmed by the letter in Figure 10-11, which is the only surviving letter carried on the Stockton-Kansas City contract mail route.



Figure 10-11. Letter postmarked in Dutch Flat, California on January 21, 1859 and carried on route 15050 to Kansas City, Missouri.

This letter was postmarked in Dutch Flat, California (northeast of Sacramento in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains) on January¹⁷ 21, 1859. It was endorsed “Overland via Stockton” and prepaid 10 cents postage to Wisconsin. It reached Stockton in time for the February 1 mail to Kansas City. With a normal transit time, it would have reached Kansas City around March 29.

The nearly simultaneous terminations of the Neosho-Albuquerque and Kansas City-Stockton contract mail routes were reported widely. The *Ohio State Journal* included the notice in its May 17, 1859 issue:

WASHINGTON, MAY 12 – The Territorial Overland mail routes between Neosho, Missouri, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, and between Kansas, Missouri and Stockton, California, which were let to contractors last year, have been discontinued, to take effect from the 1st of July next.

The failure of Congress to make the usual appropriations for the Postoffice Department, the interruptions of the mails mostly from the presence of hostile Indians along the lines, and the consequent obstruction of mail matter, to a comparatively insignificant amount, are the reasons alleged for the discontinuance of this overland service.

Endnotes

1. This is a Dike-Todsen type 1 Santa Fe postmark, which they record as used from January 1 to June 1, 1851.
2. This is a Dike-Todsen type 3 Santa Fe postmark, which they record as used from April to August 1852.
3. The July 1851 rates were three cents per half ounce up to 3,000 miles, and unpaid letters were assessed 5 cents due.
4. This is a Dike-Todsen type 9 Santa Fe postmark, which they record as used until May 1862.
5. 1851 Issue one cent type IV and a pair of the 1855 issue 10 cents type II.
6. Eight décimes for the British packet and transit postage plus 5 décimes for French inland postage. Had the letter been correctly rated as an American packet letter via England, only 8 décimes (3 décimes British transit plus 5 décimes French inland) would have been assessed.
7. This is a Dike-Todsen type 10 Santa Fe postmark.
8. The 1857 U.S.-France postal treaty established a fully-paid rate of 15 cents per quarter ounce, effective April 1. Amounts due to the receiving country were expressed in credit markings depending on which type of packet carried the letter. In this case, the New York credit to France was a double-weight six cents for French inland postage, since an American packet carried the letter directly to France. The strip of three 1857 issue 10 cents stamps making up the double rate consists of types II-III-II.
9. This is a Dike-Todsen type 6 Santa Fe postmark, recorded as used from February 1853 to November 1863.
10. Reported in the March 15, 1859 Alexandria Gazette.
11. Published in the September 12, 1858 Missouri Republican.
12. Reported in the 1859 Postmaster General's Report.
13. Reported in the March 1, 1859 Kansas City Daily Western Journal of Commerce.
14. Reported in the May 27, 1859 Westport, Missouri Border Star.
15. Reported in the July 23, 1859 Kansas City Daily Western Journal of Commerce.
16. The trips that departed from Stockton on January 1, April 1 and June 1, as described in the text of this chapter.
17. The month was originally written in pencil, but was partially erased sometime later.