

Chapter Nine

Southern Overland Mail, 1857-1861



By the late-1850s, the system of transcontinental mail routes was in a state of flux. The vast majority of trans-continental mail was carried by steamers via the Isthmus of Panama, but this expensive ocean mail contract was nearing its September 30, 1859 expiration. Meanwhile, California was clamoring for a frequent and reliable overland mail service. As seen in Chapter Seven, however, earlier experiments along the Central overland route had largely failed, but had shown some promise along the southerly trail between Salt Lake City and Los Angeles. In response to this, a March 3, 1855 Congressional Act authorized a monthly mail route between Independence, Missouri and Stockton, California via Santa Fe, although the Post Office Department would wait over three years before acting on it (see Chapter Ten). In August 1856, the 34th Congress considered a subsidized semi-weekly overland mail contract, but was unable to reach consensus. They did approve, however, a semi-monthly mail contract between San Diego, California and San Antonio, Texas via an extreme southern route in that year's postal route bill. At the same time, Congress appropriated funds for the construction of a military road between El Paso, Texas and Fort Yuma, California, which enhanced the feasibility of the San Diego–San Antonio mail route.

Congress finally approved a semi-weekly overland mail contract between St Louis and San Francisco in its March 3, 1857 Post Office Appropriation bill. Meanwhile, the Post Office Department was proceeding with the San Diego–San Antonio mail route. On June 22, 1857 it signed a four-year contract with James Birch to operate a semi-monthly mail, effective July 1. This was the first single-contract transcontinental overland mail route, designated as route 8076. Not content with that, the Postmaster General also signed a six-year contract on September 16, 1857 with a consortium led by John Butterfield to fulfill the March 1857 Congressional authorization for the St. Louis-San Francisco mail route. Route 12578 was to run along a southern route between St Louis/Memphis and San Francisco, effective September 15, 1858. Figure 9-1 illustrates these routes, including the two contracts along the Central route described in Chapter Seven and the route via Panama as described in Chapter Six.

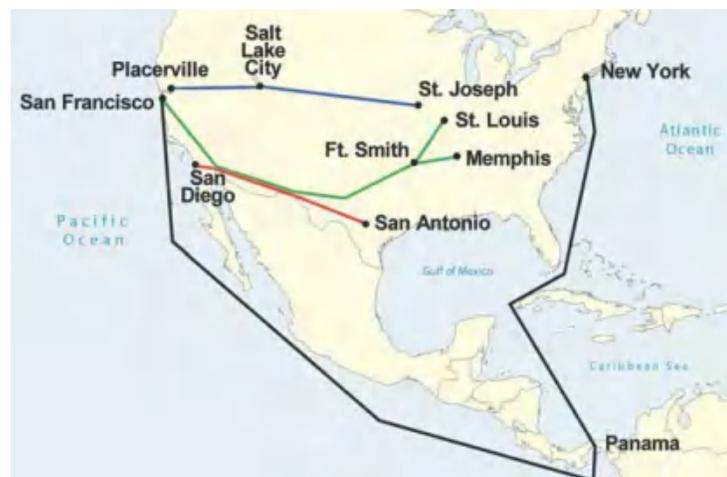


Figure 9-1. Overland mail routes, consisting of San Francisco-St. Louis/Memphis (green), San Diego-San Antonio (red) and the composite Central route (blue). Water route via Panama (black).

Early Communications with Fort Yuma

An important objective in the 1856-57 Congressional actions was to ensure rapid and reliable communications with military installations along the U.S. southern border. Fort Yuma, California was an important link in that chain, and had been built in March 1851 during the 1850-53 Yuma Indian Wars. Its main purpose was to protect settlers in the Colorado River region and to keep the southern emigration route safe.

Maintaining a connection between Fort Yuma and the California coast for supplies and mail was crucial, but the harsh Colorado Desert separated the two. Early efforts concentrated on a water connection around Baja California and up the Sea of Cortez. The letter in Figure 9-2 travelled by that route.



Figure 9-2. Letter postmarked at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania on August 2, 1854 and carried by steamers via Panama to San Francisco and forwarded to Fort Yuma by military steamers.

This letter was posted at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania on August 2, 1854, prepaid six cents transcontinental postage by a pair of 1851 issue three cents stamps. This letter left New York on August 5 aboard the USMSC steamship *George Law* to Aspinwall on August 15. After crossing the Isthmus on the mostly-completed railroad, it was carried by the PMSC steamship *Sonora* to San Francisco on August 31.

The letter is addressed to Lieutenant Beekman DuBarry, care of Major Osborne Cross, Military Quartermaster at San Francisco. DuBarry's unit, the 3rd Regiment of U.S. Artillery, had begun arriving in California in May 1854. DuBarry had been assigned in June 1854 to Fort Yuma, so Cross lined out the address in red military ink and re-directed the letter. This letter was then carried by military steamship from San Francisco via San Diego and around Baja California to the mouth of the Colorado River, and then by the supply steamer *General Jessup* of the Colorado Steam Navigation Company up the Colorado River to Fort Yuma.¹

Sometime in 1854, the U.S. Army gave a contract to Samuel Warnock and Joseph Swycaffer to carry mail and government dispatches overland between San Diego and Fort Yuma.² This service was maintained until the July 1857 start of the "Jackass Mail" contract (see below), and was known as the "Desert Dispatch." Six surviving covers endorsed "via San Diego" and addressed to Lieutenant DuBarry were

carried under this contract. Dating these covers is aided by the fact that DuBarry was re-posted away from Fort Yuma on July 31, 1856. One of the DuBarry covers is shown in Figure 9-3.

This cover was sent from West Point, New York on September 14, 1855 and correctly franked 10 cents by a three cents strip of three and a one cent stamp, all of the 1851 issue. On September 20, the letter left New York City aboard the USMSC steamship *Empire City* and arrived at Aspinwall on September 29. After a trip by rail across the Panama Isthmus, it left Panama on September 30 aboard the PMSC steamship *California* and arrived in San Francisco on October 16. It was carried to San Diego by the California Steam Navigation Company, and then by the “Desert Dispatch” to Fort Yuma.



Figure 9-3. Cover endorsed “via San Diego” and sent on September 14, 1855 from West Point to Fort Yuma, California.

“Jackass Mail” Contract Route, 1857 to 1860

Widely known to collectors as the “Jackass Mail” route, the first single-contract overland mail contract to California called for two trips per month between San Antonio, Texas and San Diego, California as authorized by Congress in August 1856. The 1,476 mile trip along route 8076, shown in Figure 9-4, was to be accomplished in thirty days.



Figure 9-4. Map showing the entire San Diego and San Antonio (Jackass Mail) route.

The San Diego and San Antonio termini had relatively frequent connections with points beyond. From the eastern terminus at San Antonio, there was a daily stagecoach mail to Indianola which connected with five-times a week steamers to New Orleans. From the western terminus at San Diego, the California Steam Navigation Company steamers operated to San Francisco, albeit only twice-monthly. A pre-existing postal route that connected San Antonio and El Paso was incorporated into the new through route and needed only minor upgrades. The El Paso-San Diego segment of the route required more substantial upgrades, and the military road authorized in 1856 only pertained to the portion between Fort Yuma and El Paso. Mail transportation across the Colorado Desert between Fort Yuma and San Diego was the biggest challenge facing the new contractor. Drawing from the experience of the 1854-57 "Desert Dispatch" service, mules were used to carry the mail and passengers, resulting in the "Jackass Mail" moniker.

For operational purposes, route was divided into two sections. The first, between El Paso and San Antonio, was operated as a round-trip unit. The second section, between El Paso and San Diego, utilized mail carriers from each end who met in the middle at Maricopa Wells to exchange the mail. The mail schedule called for simultaneous departures from San Diego and San Antonio on the 9th and 24th of each month. The first westbound mail departed from San Antonio on July 9, 1857 with James Mason in charge. A second westbound mail departed on July 24 under Captain Skillman's direction. Mason was delayed in Texas by Indian attacks and was able to proceed only after being joined by Skillman near El Paso. As a result, the first and second westbound mails arrived at San Diego together on August 31, 1857. The first eastbound trip departed from San Diego on August 9, 1857.

A significant reduction of the mail route occurred on October 27, 1858 when the Post Office Department ordered the contractor to discontinue the section between El Paso and Fort Yuma. This alteration arose from the September 16 commencement of service along Butterfield's route 12578 between St. Louis/Memphis and San Francisco, which overlapped with route 8076 in that section. The utility of the Jackass route to the postal service diminished significantly after the heart of the route was lost to Butterfield. Then, on February 1, 1860 the route was further reduced when service between San Diego and Fort Yuma was discontinued, effective April 1, since it could be replaced by the Los Angeles-Fort Yuma segment of the Butterfield route. This left the line operating only the intra-Texas route between El Paso and San Antonio, and eliminated the service by mule. The Jackass route ended at this point.

Approximately forty trips were made over the entire route prior to the 1858 reduction, but no surviving covers are known from that period. The Postmaster General reported postal receipts on the route of \$601 from July 1858 to June 1859, so not much mail was carried. Covers on this route were to be endorsed "via San Diego and San Antonio" or similar. Other covers carried on segments of the route within Texas or between Texas and the East are known but are not considered to be "Jackass Mail."

A "Jackass Mail" cover sent after the October 1858 route reduction bears the full endorsement "Via San Diego & San Antonio." Shown in Figure 9-5, this November 1859 cover is on the imprint stationery of the Alta California Newspaper Office and is franked by a 10 cents type V stamp of the 1857 issue.³ The letter was postmarked at San Francisco for the November 21 steamship departure for San Diego. It then left San Diego on November 24 and was carried on the Jackass route to Fort Yuma. Because of the route reduction, it was transferred at Fort Yuma to the Butterfield route for the trip to El Paso, and then transferred back to route 8076 for the segment between El Paso and San Antonio. The cover is docketed as having been received on December 15 in New Orleans - a remarkable 24 days from San Francisco.



Figure 9-5. Imprint cover, endorsed via San Diego and San Antonio, sent November 21, 1859 from San Francisco to New Orleans.

The envelope contains an interesting letter datelined November 18, 1859 at San Francisco:

Dear Sir,
 We wish you would upon receipt of this ascertain the time of departure of mail from your city via San Antonio and send us a short weekly letter, with the latest telegraphic news etc. by that route. The agents of the Company think they will be able to make time at least 3 days ahead of the St. Louis line. We will notify you of the success of the experiment.
 Respt, Yours, F. Mac Crellish & Co.

Butterfield Contract Mail Route, 1858 to 1861

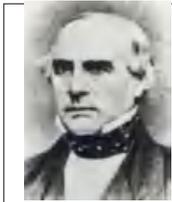


Figure 9-6. Map of the Butterfield overland mail route, showing the dual eastern termini at St. Louis and Memphis, with a bifurcation at Fort Smith.

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Postmaster General Brown stipulated the 2,800-mile route to be followed when he awarded the twice-weekly overland contract to John Butterfield and his associates on September 16, 1857. Figure 9-6 shows the selected route, known as the Butterfield or Southern Overland route.

The map shows that two eastern termini were required, at St Louis and Memphis, Tennessee. To reach both termini, the route was bifurcated at Fort Smith, Arkansas. On the western side, the route ran through



John Butterfield, Mail Contractor, 1801-1869

- Born near Albany, NY
- Ran stagecoach lines throughout NY, 1822-49
- Organized the American Express Company in 1850
- President of the Overland Mail Company, 1857-60
- Elected Mayor of Utica, NY in 1865

California between San Francisco and Los Angeles. As mentioned above, the portion of the route between Fort Yuma and El Paso was already being serviced by the San Diego-San Antonio mail line, so this duplication was removed from the San Diego-San Antonio contract on October 27, 1858.

The value of the contract for route 12578 was \$600 thousand per year to the contractors for a twice-weekly mail in 25 days each way, but they had to man and stock the route at their own expense. Butterfield formed the Overland Mail Company for this purpose in October 1857 and began making preparations for a service

commencement in September 1858.

Per the twice-weekly westbound schedule with departures on Mondays and Thursdays, the first trip left St Louis on Thursday, September 16, 1858 and arrived in San Francisco on October 10, in just under 24 days. The first eastbound trip left San Francisco very early on September 15 and arrived in St Louis on October 9, in just under 25 days. Scheduled eastbound departures from San Francisco soon settled on Mondays and Fridays of each week. The service that ensued was very reliable, and trip times fell to 23 days or less (see Appendix F for a listing of Butterfield trips). Table 9-1 shows the initial published Butterfield schedule.

Table 9-1 Overland Mail Company through Time Schedule, September 16, 1858

Station	Eastbound	Westbound
San Francisco	Depart Mon. & Thursday	Arrive 24 days out
Visalia, California	2 days out	22 days out
San Bernardino, Calif.	4 days out	19 days out
Fort Yuma, Calif.	6 days out	18 days out
Tucson, Arizona	9 days out	15 days out
El Paso, Texas	12 days out	12 days out
Fort Smith, Arkansas	20 days out	4 days out
St. Louis, Missouri	Arrive 24 days out	Depart Mon. & Thursday

Following the September 30, 1859 expiration of the ocean mail via Panama contracts, the Postmaster General ordered on December 17, 1859 that the default route for transcontinental letter mail was overland (on the Butterfield line) rather than by steamship via Panama. This overland default order was announced in California newspapers on January 20, but not implemented in California until January 23. It dramatically increased the mail receipts carried by Butterfield to \$120 thousand in the year ending June 1860, although the line was still operating at a large loss to the Post Office Department. Prior to the December 17

announcement, only mail specifically endorsed to the Butterfield line (i.e. "Overland via Los Angeles," or "Overland via St Louis") was carried by Butterfield. Following the announcement, all letter mail was carried by Butterfield unless specifically endorsed otherwise.

Butterfield Mail Prior to the December 17 Overland Default Order

Mail from before the December 17, 1859 order can be identified by endorsements on the letters. Figure 9-7 shows an early eastbound example from this period. This cover with a manuscript "p(er) South(ern) Overland Mail" directive bears a San Francisco October 22, 1858 postmark and was prepaid 10 cents transcontinental postage to New York City. It departed on the Friday, October 22 Butterfield stagecoach, and arrived in St Louis on November 16. It was then carried by rail to New York.

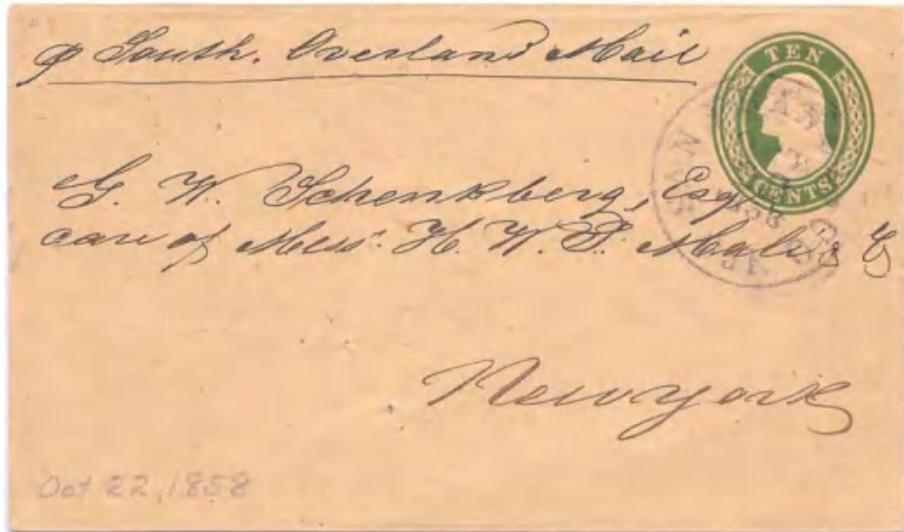


Figure 9-7. Letter endorsed per "South. Overland Mail" and sent on October 22, 1858 from San Francisco to New York.

Westbound mail is somewhat scarcer than eastbound mail. Figure 9-8 shows an August 1859 example. This letter was endorsed "Overland via St. Louis" and posted in Boston on August 29, 1859. It was prepaid 10 cents transcontinental postage to San Francisco. The Butterfield stagecoach left St Louis on Monday, September 5, but was forced to return to St Louis because of high waters. It left again on September 8, and arrived in San Francisco on October 1.

Starting in the spring of 1859, printed envelopes with overland directives began to appear, almost exclusively on eastbound mail. Figure 9-9 shows an early example. This envelope with a simple printed endorsement was postmarked in San Francisco on April 29, 1859 and prepaid 10 cents transcontinental postage to Connecticut. It departed on the Friday, April 29 Butterfield stagecoach and arrived in St Louis on May 25.



Figure 9-8. Letter endorsed "Overland via St. Louis" and sent on August 29, 1859 from Boston to San Francisco.



Figure 9-9. "Overland via Los Angeles" printed envelope sent on April 29, 1859 from San Francisco to Connecticut.

The endorsements became more elaborate with time. Figure 9-10 shows an August 1859 example.

This envelope with printed stagecoach design endorsement was postmarked in San Francisco on August 5, 1859 and prepaid 16 cents (overpay of the 15 cents French convention rate) in 1857 issue stamps to Givet, France. It departed on the Friday, August 5 Butterfield stagecoach which arrived in St Louis

on August 27, and was carried by rail to New York City. At the New York foreign exchange office, it received an August 31 "Paid" postmark with 12 cents credit (eight cents British packet and transit plus four cents French inland postage) to France. It was then routed to the Cunard steamer *Asia*, which left on that day and arrived in Liverpool on September 11. England sent the letter across the English Channel to Calais, where it entered the French mail system at a travelling railroad office with a September 12 "Et. Unis Serv. Br. A. C." (From the United States by British service) entry marking.



Figure 9-10. Printed stagecoach envelope "from San Francisco via Los Angeles" sent on August 5, 1859 from San Francisco to France.

Californians were also agitating for the transcontinental railroad, so some printed endorsements expressed their desire for that. Figure 9-11 shows an example.

This envelope with railroad propaganda printed endorsement reading "Per Overland Stage, via Los Angeles in Hope of the (railroad)" was postmarked in San Francisco on September 23, 1859 and prepaid 10 cents transcontinental postage to Massachusetts. It departed on the Friday, September 23 Butterfield stagecoach that arrived in St Louis around October 15.



Figure 9-11. Printed railroad propaganda envelope "Per Overland Mail Stage, via Los Angeles" sent on September 23, 1859 from San Francisco to Massachusetts.

Post Office Directive Handstamps Prior to the December 17 Default Order

The San Francisco and Sacramento post offices introduced special straight-line "OVERLAND" handstamps prior to the December 17 overland default order. Examples of these auxiliary directive markings applied prior to January 23, 1860 can be interpreted as meaning: "This letter was received too late to catch the mail steamer departure from San Francisco and is being sent by the Butterfield overland mail instead."

A recent census³ records 53 covers with all of the known types of auxiliary overland handstamps. The largest group of these is the 33 covers that bear the San Francisco type 1 handstamp, used almost exclusively in the seven month period between October 1859 and April 1860. The marking, which shows a dropped "R" in the word "OVERLAND," is illustrated on the cover in Figure 9-12.



Figure 9-12. Cover sent on October 3, 1859 from Honolulu via San Francisco to New York with a type 1 San Francisco "OVERLAND" handstamp.

This letter originated in Hana, Maui on September 7, 1859 and was prepaid five cents Hawaiian postage plus 12 cents U.S. postage (10 cents transcontinental postage plus two cents ship fee) in cash. It received an October 3 "Honolulu U.S. Postage Paid" postmark, indicating that the 12 cents U.S. postage was credited from the Hawaiian post office to the U.S. post office. It left on October 3 aboard the ship *Yankee* which arrived in San Francisco on October 21, a day after the departure of the semi-monthly mail steamer. It was determined that the quickest service to the East was via Butterfield stagecoach, so the cover received the type 1 "OVERLAND" handstamp to indicate that the choice of this route was by the postmaster. It was also postmarked "Paid 12" for the Monday, October 24 departure of the Butterfield mail, which arrived in St. Louis on November 18. In comparison, the mail that departed San Francisco on the October 20 steamship via Panama arrived in New York from Aspinwall on November 21.

A different "OVERLAND" auxiliary marking was used in Sacramento. There are six reported covers, used in the August 1859 to January 1860 period. Figure 9-13 illustrates this marking. This cover was prepaid 10



Figure 9-13. Cover sent on October 10, 1859 from Sacramento via San Francisco to Pennsylvania with a Sacramento "OVERLAND" handstamp.

cents transcontinental postage and postmarked at Sacramento on Monday, October 10, 1859. It also bears an "OVERLAND" handstamp in matching ink. The letter was posted too late to make the October 10 Butterfield overland departure from San Francisco, so the Sacramento postmaster used the "OVERLAND" handstamp to direct that the cover should go overland on the following trip that departed on October 14, rather than by the steamer that was departing on October 20. The October 14 stagecoach arrived in St. Louis around November 15.

Different "OVERLAND" directive handstamps were also used at Nevada City and San Francisco after the December 17 overland default notice. They are described below.

Butterfield Mail After the December 17 Overland Default Order

After the Postmaster General's December 17 overland order set the Butterfield route as the default for transcontinental letter mails, it was no longer necessary to endorse letters for the Butterfield service.

Unendorsed letters would be forwarded by the Butterfield route, rather than by the Panama steamship route, as was the case previous to the order. The effective date of the order for west coast offices was January 23, 1860. Even though it was no longer necessary to endorse letters to the Butterfield route, letters continued to be so endorsed. A remarkable example is shown in Figure 9-14.

This letter was posted in Auburn, California (north of Sacramento in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains) on March 11, 1860, prepaid 10 cents for the postage to Vermont. Although unnecessary, it carries a detailed manuscript endorsement to the Butterfield route, "Overland via Visalia, Fort Tejon, Los Angeles, Fort Yuma, El Paso & Fort Smith." The endorsement was probably intended to direct the letter from Auburn directly to Visalia to meet the stagecoach there. Accordingly, it caught the Monday, March 12 stagecoach from San Francisco, which passed through Visalia on March 14, and arrived in St. Louis around April 3.

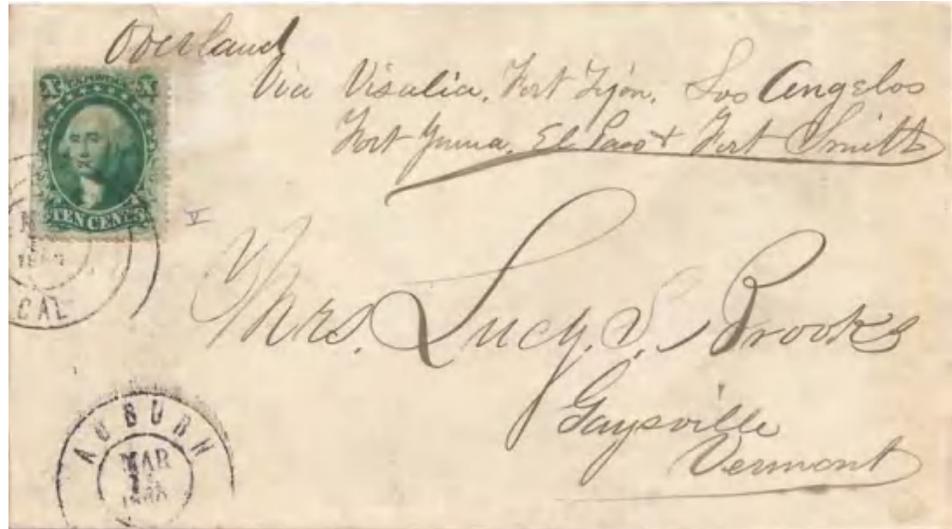


Figure 9-14. Cover sent from Auburn, California on March 11, 1860 via the Butterfield overland mail to Vermont.

The U.S. postal rates in force between April 1855 and February 1861 were 10 cents per half ounce for distances over 3,000 miles and three cents for distances less than that. The entire length of the Butterfield route was slightly over 2,800 miles, so a letter sent between San Francisco and St. Louis (or intermediate points) would only be charged three cents postage.

Figure 9-15 shows an example of the three cents rate on a printed stagecoach envelope.

This envelope with printed stagecoach endorsement was postmarked in San Francisco on October

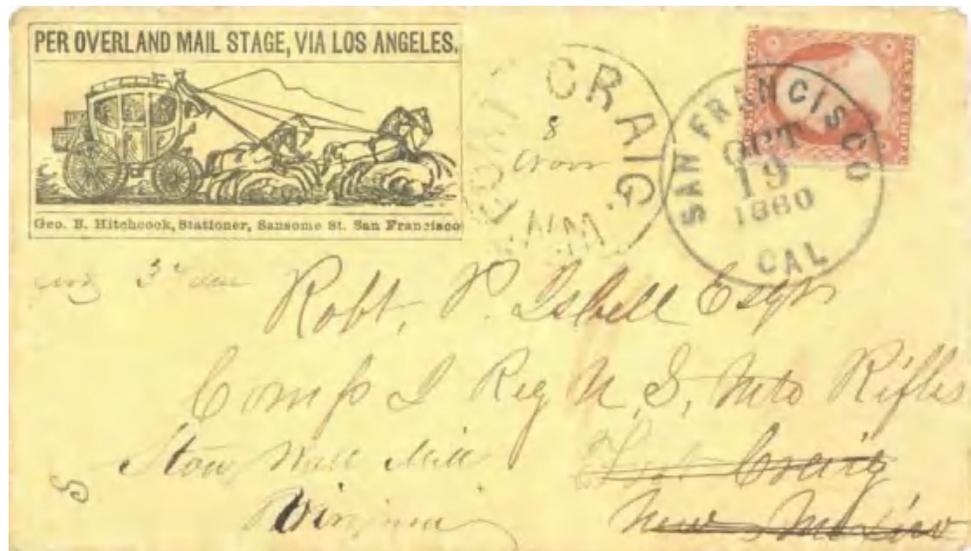


Figure 9-15. Printed stagecoach envelope "Per Overland Mail Stage, via Los Angeles" sent from San Francisco to New Mexico on October 19, 1860.

19, 1860 and prepaid three cents postage to Fort Craig, New Mexico. It departed on the Friday, October 19 Butterfield coach which passed through Mesilla, New Mexico around October 30. It was then carried from Mesilla to Fort Craig, where it was discovered that the addressee had returned to Virginia. Accordingly, the letter was postmarked at Fort Craig on November 8 and rated for three cents postage due to Stow Wall Mill, Virginia. It probably caught the October 29 stagecoach from San Francisco, which passed through Mesilla around November 9, and arrived in St. Louis on November 19. Total postage collected on this letter was six cents, but would have been 10 cents if it had originally been addressed to Virginia.

Endorsements from foreign countries are rare. Figure 9-16 shows a manuscript endorsement on a westbound March 1860 letter from France.



Figure 9-16. Letter endorsed "Malle overland - Via Los Angeles" and sent from Bordeaux, France to San Francisco on March 31, 1860.

This triple-weight letter was prepaid 2 francs 40 centimes and posted on the Bordeaux-to-Paris train on March 31, 1860. Addressed to San Francisco, the letter has a manuscript endorsement to the Butterfield route, "Malle overland - Via Los Angeles." The French credited 27 cents (three times U.S. packet postage of six cents plus three times U.S. inland postage of three cents) to the United States and sent the letter via England to catch the New York & Havre Line steamer *Arago*, which departed from Southampton on April 4 and arrived in New York on April 18. The letter was postmarked "Paid 45" (restatement of the triple 15 cents French mail rate) in New York on April 19 and travelled by rail to St Louis, where it caught the Monday, April 23 Butterfield coach. The letter finally arrived in San Francisco around May 22.

Mail not specifically endorsed to Butterfield was still carried overland. On eastbound mail, the San Francisco postmark should correlate to a Butterfield departure. Figure 9-17 shows an example.

This letter was written in Victoria, Vancouver Island in early September 1860, and was carried by the HMS *Ganges* to San Francisco for transmission to Connecticut. The HMS *Ganges* had arrived off San Juan Island, Washington Territory in July 1859 in support of a military confrontation between the United States and Great Britain known as 1859-60 "Pig War." The ownership of the San Juan Islands was in dispute, and each side sent settlers to substantiate its claim. When an American settler shot a



Figure 9-17. Letter from the HMS *Ganges* endorsed "via San Francisco" and sent from San Francisco to Connecticut on September 27, 1860.

British-owned pig on June 15, 1859 the bloodless (other than the pig) confrontation began, and was settled by an agreement for joint occupation of the islands in March 1860. Following that resolution, the HMS *Ganges* left Victoria on September 9 and arrived in San Francisco with this letter on September 20. The letter, prepaid 10 cents transcontinental postage, was postmarked in San Francisco on September 27. It was carried by the Butterfield stage which left the next day and arrived in St. Louis on October 21.

Post Office Directive Handstamps after the December 17 Default Order

San Francisco postmaster Weller changed the default from steamer service via Panama to the Butterfield overland route on January 23, 1860. Accordingly, it is not clear why special "OVERLAND" post office directional handstamps were needed after that date.

The type 2 San Francisco "OVERLAND" marking was introduced in late 1860, distinguished by a dropped "LAN" in the lettering. Ten examples are reported with uses dated between September 6 and October 26, 1860. One of the three reported examples that originated in San Francisco is shown in Figure 9-18.



Figure 9-18. Cover sent from San Francisco on September 24, 1860 to Locarno, Switzerland with a San Francisco type 2 "OVERLAND" handstamp.

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This letter was prepaid the 35 cents Prussian closed mail rate to Locarno, Switzerland and endorsed in manuscript to be sent overland. It was postmarked in San Francisco for the Friday, September 24, 1860 Butterfield stagecoach departure. It arrived in St Louis on October 15, and was carried by rail to New York, where it was postmarked for the October 20 departure of the Inman steamer *City of Baltimore*. New York credited 12 cents (seven cents to Prussia plus five cents for the additional postage to Switzerland) to Prussia per the manuscript magenta "12" and placed the letter in the closed mail to Prussia. It arrived in Queenstown on November 2 and, after transiting Great Britain and Belgium, was postmarked on the Verviers-to-Cologne train as fully paid per the boxed November 3 "Aachen Franco" marking. The mail clerk also marked "f2" in the lower left to indicate that postage had been paid to the second Swiss rayon. The letter was then sent via Baden per a November 4 "E.B. Curs. V" railroad marking. After passing through Lucerne, the letter arrived at Locarno on November 7, where a clerk indicated that postage had been paid by writing a red "6" (kr.) over the f2 in the lower left.

The Nevada City post office also employed a distinctive "OVERLAND" marking, known used between June and November 1860. Only two examples of this marking are known, and one of them is shown in Figure 9-19.



Figure 9-19. Cover sent on June 15, 1860 from Nevada City, California via San Francisco to Pennsylvania with a Nevada City "OVERLAND" handstamp.

This letter was prepaid 10 cents transcontinental postage to Pennsylvania and posted in Nevada City, California on June 15, 1860. It was forwarded by the Monday, June 18 Butterfield stagecoach from San Francisco, which arrived in St. Louis around July 11.

The End of the Southern Butterfield Mail Route

The election of President Lincoln in November 1860 set in motion the secession of the southern states and the Civil War. The Texas convention passed an ordinance of secession on February 1, 1861 and General David Twiggs surrendered the U.S. army forts and personnel in Texas on February 18. This gave Confederate sympathizers opportunities to confiscate equipment and stock from the Butterfield stations in Texas, and also opened the threat of Indian depredations on the stations. After reports of this were received in Washington, D.C., Congress passed the March 2, 1861 Post Office Appropriation bill which

discontinued the Butterfield overland service (route 12578) and moved the daily overland mail contract to the Central route, effective July 1, 1861. The Overland Mail Company struggled to maintain service in the March-April 1861 period. The last westbound Butterfield mail left St. Louis on March 21 and arrived in San Francisco on April 13. The final eastbound mail left San Francisco on April 1 and arrived in St. Louis on May 1. The April 5, 1861 San Francisco *Bulletin* reported that:

The Overland Mail by the Butterfield route did not leave this city today for St. Louis, as usual and will be discontinued hereafter. The following communication from Postmaster Weller fully explains the cause of the cessation of this mail,

POST OFFICE, San Francisco, April 5, 1861

EDITOR BULLETIN: You will see by the following letter received this morning from Washington, that there will be no through Overland mails dispatched from this office from this day until the 1st of June next, that being the time fixed for the commencement of the new service via the Central route.

Figure 9-20 shows a late westbound cover. This letter was prepaid 10 cents transcontinental postage and posted in Westfield, Massachusetts on March 6, 1861. It left St. Louis on the Monday, March 11 stagecoach and was docketed as received in San Francisco on April 3, a trip in the regular time of 23 days. Only three westbound trips left after this.



Figure 9-20. Letter endorsed “Overland” and sent on March 6, 1861 from Westfield, Massachusetts to San Francisco.

Endnotes

1. Richard Frajola, "Steamboat Mail on the Colorado River," Chronicle No. 221, Vol. 61, No. 1 (February 2009), pages 33-36.
2. Based on research by Jim Blaine and communicated privately to the authors.
3. This 10 cents payment represents an overpayment of the three cents rate for a distance of less than 3,000 miles, since the total distance was roughly 2,500 miles.
4. Frajola & Perlman, "Post Office Overland Mail Directive Handstamps."