

1860-61: American Pony Express Mail

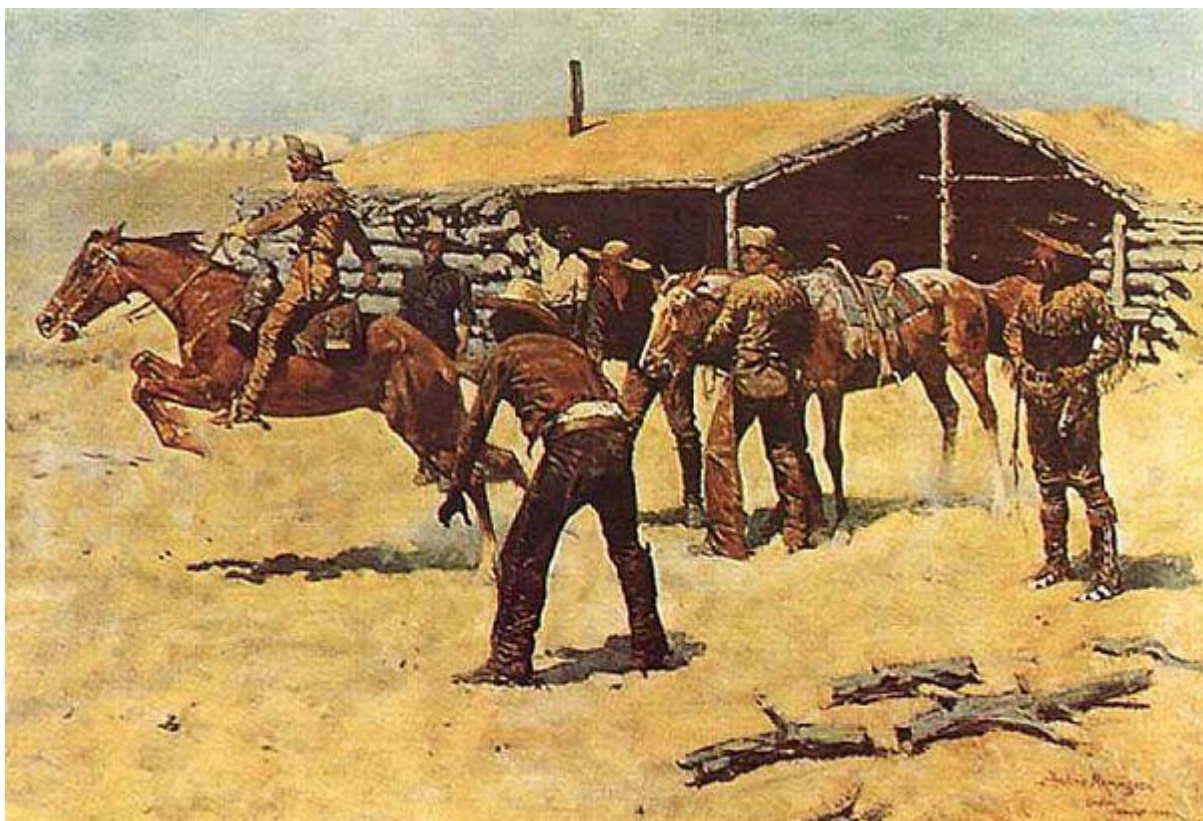
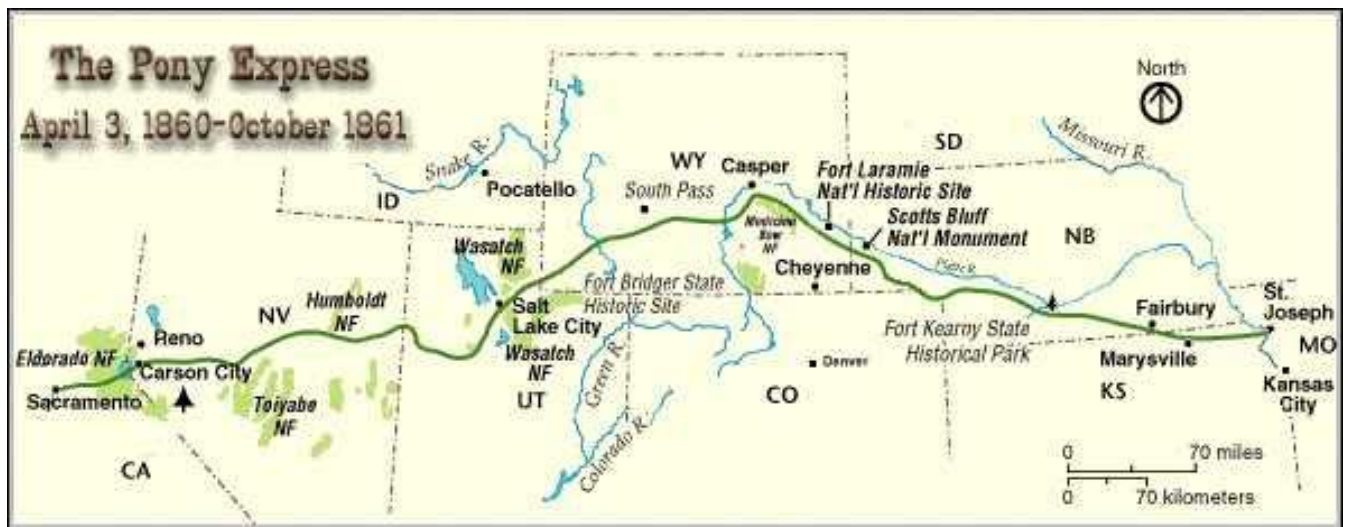


1. The Pony Express was more than twice as fast as its competitors.

In the mid-19th century, California-bound mail had to either be taken overland by a 25-day stagecoach or spend months going by ship. **The Pony Express**, meanwhile, had an average delivery time of just 10 days. To achieve this, company owners William H. Russell, William B. Waddell and Alexander Majors set up a string of nearly 200 relief stations across what is now Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Nevada and California. Lone horsemen would ride between stations at breakneck pace, switching mounts every 10-15 miles and then handing their cargo off to a new courier after 75-100 miles. The relay system allowed mail to criss-cross the frontier in record time.

The Pony Express was a byname of the **Central Overland California & Pike's Peak Express Company**

The route was from **St. Joseph, Missouri** to **Sacramento, California** and thence from **Sacramento** to **San Francisco, California** by steamer.



Typical Relief Station

2. It was a financial flop.

Despite its enduring place in Old West legend, the **Pony Express** never turned a profit during its year and a half history. The company began deliveries in April 1860, but service ground to a halt just a few weeks later when the **Pyramid Lake War** erupted between the United States and the **Paiute Indians**. The temporary shutdown cost the company some \$75,000, and it continued to haemorrhage cash over the next few months due to high operations costs and its failure to secure a government mail contract. Though hailed in the press for its efficiency and adventurous spirit, the **Pony Express** eventually folded in October 1861, having lost \$200,000.

3. There was a weight limit for Pony Express riders.

Since speed was its main goal, the **Pony Express** went to great lengths to keep its horses' loads as light as possible. Most of the riders were small, wiry men who weighed between 100 and 125 pounds—roughly the same size as a modern horse-racing jockey. Average age was around 20, but it wasn't unusual for 14 year old teenagers to be hired.



PONY EXPRESS

St. JOSEPH, MISSOURI to CALIFORNIA
in 10 days or less.

➔ **WANTED** ➔

YOUNG, SKINNY, WIRY FELLOWS
not over eighteen. Must be expert
riders, willing to risk death daily.

Orphans preferred.
Wages \$25 per week.

APPLY, **PONY EXPRESS STABLES**
St. JOSEPH, MISSOURI

Note: "Orphans Preferred"!

4. Riders were required to take a loyalty oath.

In exchange for their \$100-150 monthly salaries—a substantial sum for the time—**Pony Express** riders were expected to take a loyalty oath that read: “I do hereby swear, before the Great and Living God, that during my engagement, and while an employee of Russell, Majors and Waddell, I will, under no circumstances, use profane language, that I will drink no intoxicating liquors, that I will not quarrel or fight with any other employee of the firm, and that in every respect I will conduct myself honestly, be faithful to my duties, and so direct all my acts as to win the confidence of my employers, so help me God.”

Those who broke the rules risked being dismissed without pay, but it appears that few **Pony Express** employees followed the pledge. Liquor flowed freely at relief stations, and an eyewitness reported that he “scarcely ever saw a sober rider.”

5. Mail was carried in a specially designed saddlebag.




To cut down on weight and facilitate swift horse and rider changes, a special type of mailbag known as a “mochilla”, the Spanish word for knapsack was used. This consisted of a leather cover that was draped over the saddle and held in place by the

rider's weight. It had 4 padlocked pockets - three for mail and one for the rider's timecard - and was capable of holding up to 20 pounds of cargo. At each relief station, riders would simply grab the mochilla off one mount and then throw it over the next, allowing them to switch horses in 2 minutes.

6. Ordinary people almost never used the Pony Express.

Originally the service cost \$5 for every half-ounce of mail—the equivalent of some \$130 today. Prices were later reduced to just \$1, but they still remained too high for everyday mail. Instead, the service was mainly used to deliver newspaper reports, government dispatches and business documents, most of which were printed on tissue-thin paper to keep costs (and weight) down. **Only 250 known examples of Pony Express mail remain.**

PONY EXPRESS!

CHANGE OF
TIME!REDUCED
RATES!

10 Days to San Francisco!

LETTERS

WILL BE RECEIVED AT THE

OFFICE, 84 BROADWAY, NEW YORK,

Up to **4 P. M.** every **TUESDAY**,
AND
Up to **2½ P. M.** every **SATURDAY**,

Which will be forwarded to connect with the PONY EXPRESS leaving
ST. JOSEPH, Missouri,

Every WEDNESDAY and SATURDAY at 11 P. M.

TELEGRAMS

Sent to Fort Kearney on the mornings of MONDAY and FRIDAY, will connect with PONY leaving St. Joseph, WEDNESDAYS and SATURDAYS.

EXPRESS CHARGES.

LETTERS weighing half ounce or under..... \$1 00
For every additional half ounce or fraction of an ounce 1 00
In all cases to be enclosed in 10 cent Government Stamped Envelopes,
And all Express **CHARGES** Pre-paid.

PONY EXPRESS ENVELOPES For Sale at our Office.

WELLS, FARGO & CO., Ag'ts.

New York, July 1, 1861.

SLOVE & JAMES, STATIONERS AND PRINTERS, 96 FULTON STREET, NEW YORK

Poster Advertising the Reduce Rate

7. Riders didn't have the deadliest job

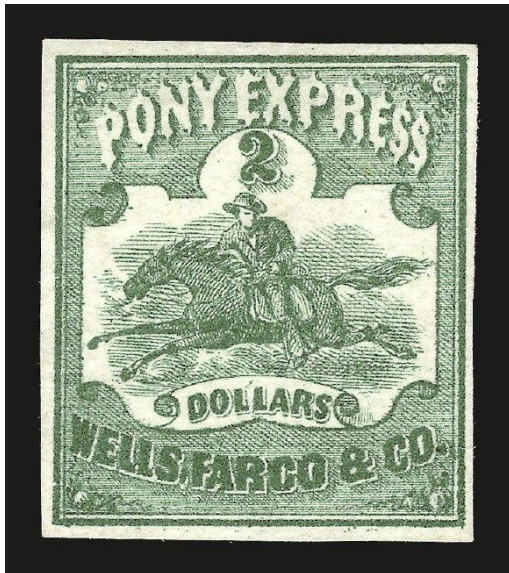
Pony Express riders had to deal with extreme weather conditions, harsh terrain and the threat of attacks by bandits and Indians, but life may have been even more dangerous for the stock keepers who manned the relief stations. Their outposts were usually crude, dirt floor hovels equipped with little more than sleeping quarters and corrals for the horses. Many were located in remote sections of the frontier, making them extremely vulnerable to ambush. Accounts differ, but Indians reportedly attacked or burned several relay stations during the Pyramid Lake War in the summer of 1860, killing as many as 16 stock hands. By contrast, only a handful of riders - six, according to the National Park Service - died in the line of duty during the entire history of the **Pony Express**.

8. The transcontinental telegraph dealt the Pony Express its deathblow.

For all its financial troubles, the **Pony Express** didn't truly collapse until a better alternative appeared on the scene. The company had spent its brief history bridging the gap between the Eastern and Western telegraph lines, but it was finally rendered obsolete on October 24, 1861, when Western Union completed the transcontinental telegraph line at Salt Lake City. The **Pony Express** ceased service just two days later. Despite operating for only 19 months, its riders had successfully delivered some 35,000 pieces of mail and travelled more than half a million miles across the American frontier.

9. Wells Fargo

In April 1861, Wells, Fargo and Company took over the **Pony Express** routes west of Salt Lake City. To make accounting easier and to advertise their company, they hired Britton and Company to print stamps for the eastbound mail from California.



Example Wells Fargo Pony Express Stamps

Wells Fargo issued five "Horse and Rider" stamps of this type in different colours and denominations. These semi-official stamps were used only on eastbound mail originating in California.

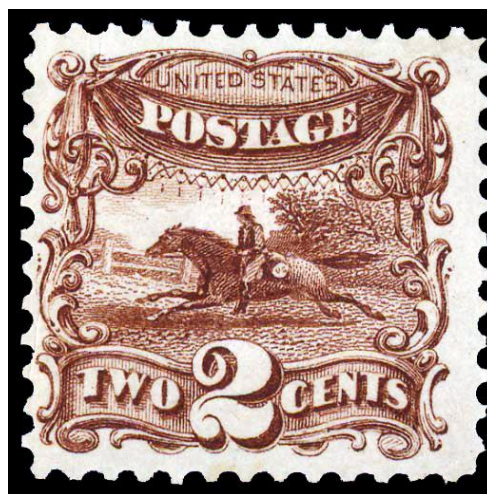
The **Pony Express** stamp only covered the part of delivering the letter. At the end of the run, the letters would be turned over to the Post Office to be delivered by the postal service, so a postage stamp was also required.



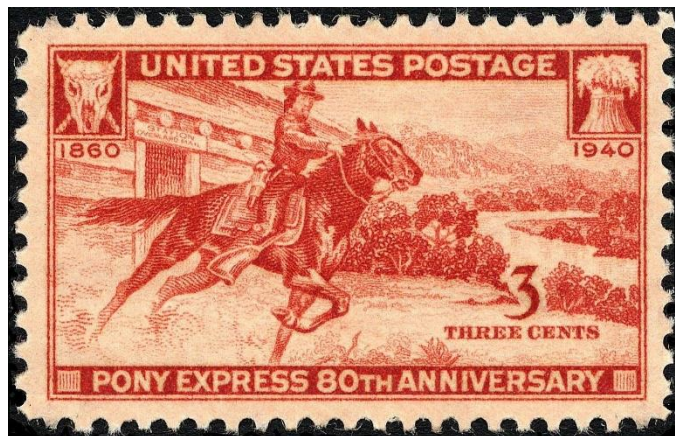
10c Washington on Pony Express cover, 1860

A **Pony Express** rider carried this cover, considered one of the most historically significant in U.S. postal history. Notice the notation on the front: "recovered from a mail stolen by the Indians in 1860."

This cover bears an oval marking that reads "The Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Company" that administered the **Pony Express**. American Indians overtook the **Pony Express** rider, interrupting delivery. The pony escaped with the letter pouch, which was later recovered on the plains. The letters were forwarded to their destination. This cover is one of only two known examples. It reached New York in 1862. By then, the **Pony Express** no longer existed.



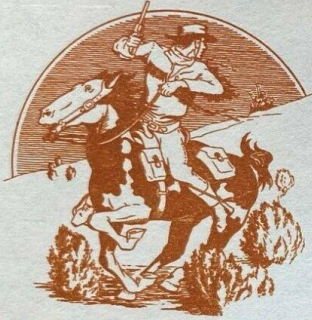
From 1869 Commemorative Set



80th Anniversary Commemoration



100th Anniversary Plate Block of 4



PONY EXPRESS CENTENNIAL

THE PONY EXPRESS WAS INAUGURATED APRIL 3, 1860, AT 5:00 P.M. WHEN TWO HORSEMEN STARTED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM SACRAMENTO, CALIF. AND ST. JOSEPH, MO., CARRYING MAIL IN BOTH DIRECTIONS BETWEEN THE TWO TERMINAL STATIONS. THE ROUTE, 1980 MILES IN LENGTH, LAY THROUGH ROUGH, INDIAN-INFESTED COUNTRY. THE MAIL WAS CARRIED IN RELAYS. EACH RIDER RIDING ABOUT 100 MILES, CHANGING HORSES EVERY TEN MILES. TIME REQUIRED WAS 8 DAYS. THERE WERE 190 RELAY STATIONS, 300 STATION KEEPERS, 80 RIDERS AND 420 HORSES USED. THE SERVICE ENDED IN OCTOBER, 1861.



FIRST DAY OF ISSUE



V. Deacon Lile
1026 East Linden Ave.
Richmond Heights, Mo.

100th Anniversary Stamped Envelope