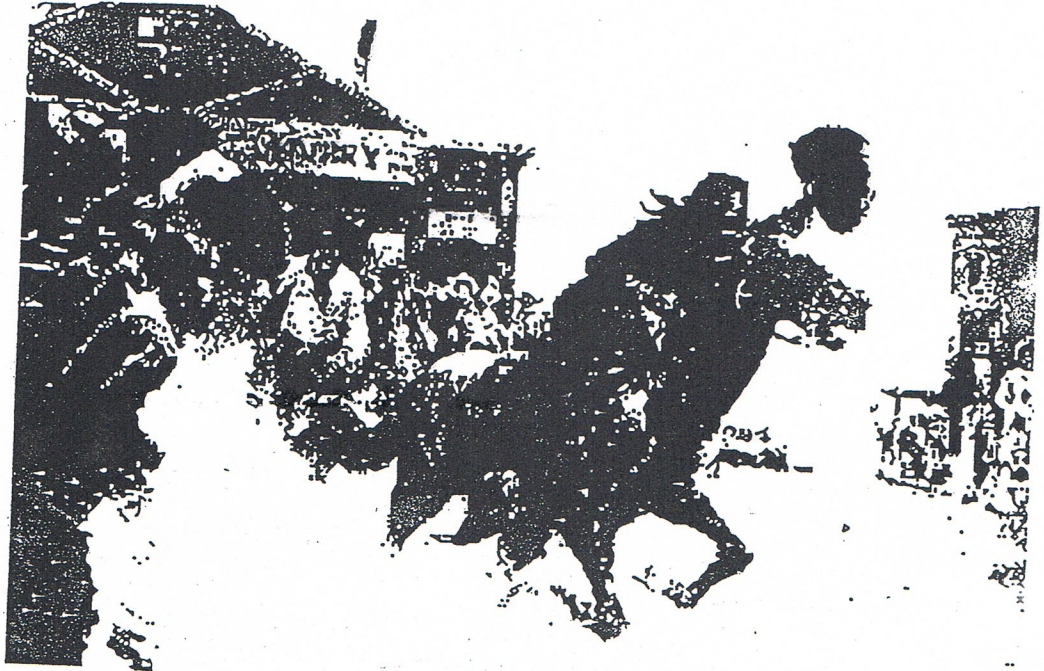


Pony Express Information

Purpose:

To provide the fastest mail delivery between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California. To draw public attention to the central route in hope of gaining the million dollar government mail contract for the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company.



Date:

April 3, 1860, to late October 1861.

Mechanics:

Relay of mail by horses and riders. The Pony Express ran day and night, summer and winter.

Riders:

183 men are known to have ridden for the Pony Express during its operation of just over 18 months.

Rider Qualifications:

Ad in California newspaper read: "Wanted. Young, skinny, wiry fellows. Not over 18. Must be expert riders. Willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred." Most riders were around 20. Youngest was 11. Oldest was mid-40s. Not many were orphans. Usually weighed around 120 pounds.

Riders Pay

\$100 per month.

First Riders:

Johnny Fry was first westbound rider from St. Joseph. Billy Hamilton was first eastbound driver from Sacramento.

Founders:

William Russell, Alexander Majors, and William Waddell. The company was the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company. The Pony Express was a subsidiary of the famous freight and stage company.

Other Mail Routes:

Water route from New York to San Francisco and across Panama by pack mule. Southern or Butterfield route from St. Louis and Memphis to El Paso to Los Angeles to San Francisco.

Telegraph Completed:

October 24, 1861. Official end of the Pony Express.

Failures:

Financially, the owners spent \$700,000 on the Pony Express and had a \$200,000 deficit. The company failed to get the million dollar government contract because of political pressures and the outbreak of the Civil War.

Successes:

Improved communication between east and west. Proved the central route could be traveled all winter. Supported the central route for the transcontinental railroad. Kept communication open to California at the beginning of the Civil War. Provided the fastest communication between east and west until the telegraph. Captured the hearts and the imagination of people all over the world.

Folklore:

One mochila lost and one rider killed. Location, date and names have not been verified.

Suggested reading:

- ✔ Benson, Joseph *The Traveler's Guide to Pony Express*
Helena, Montana: Falcon Press, 1995
 - ✔ Beggs, W.S. and Nathan, M.C. *The Pony Express, Collector's Handbook no. 15*,
New York: Theodore E. Steinway Memorial Publication Fund, 1962
 - ✔ Dunlop, Richard *Great Trails of the West*, Nashville:
Abingdon Press, 1971
 - ✔ Loving, Mabel *The Pony Express Rides On, St. Joseph*,
Missouri: Roibidoux Printing Co., 1961
-

Now it was Thomas Bedford's turn, for he was the one selected to carry the mail onto Oakland. Taking the mochila from Sam, Thomas boarded the ferry "Carquinez". The ferry had just left its berth when Thomas discovered to his dismay that his horse had lost one of his shoes. What was he to do? He would be unable to continue unless he could fix that shoe.

As fate would have it Casemoro Briones, who had a blacksmith shop in Martinez, was also onboard. He agreed to loan Thomas a horse so that the trip could be continued.

The ferry arrived at Martinez. Horse and rider sprang from the deck, dashed up the wharf and were soon lost to sight. They headed out the road to Pacheco, onto The Corners, through Lafayette, over the Oakland Hills, down Claremont Canyon, and into Oakland.

Now after all his efforts, it looked as if he might still miss the San Francisco ferry. The ride over the Oakland hills had been slower than expected. A few minutes ago he had heard the departure whistle from the ferry boat "Oakland". The ferry slip finally came into view. He saw the Captain on the bridge of the "Oakland" urging him on.

He reached the ferryboat just in time, completing the 24-mile trip from Martinez to Oakland in one hour and forty minutes. A local newspaper of the time reported that "...the Pony did not shed his shoes, his rider did not break his neck, nor was there any appreciable smell of fire upon his cloths when he came in".

The mochila with its precious packages of mail and news was placed aboard the ferry and left for San Francisco where it arrived at 10:30 in the morning; total time from Sacramento - nine hours and fifteen minutes.

There were a number of other times that the Pony Express was routed overland between Sacramento and San Francisco. However, this first ride by Sam Hamilton and Thomas Bedford came at a critical time when the Express had to prove that a scheduled delivery of news and mail could be maintained. Together, these two young men played a most important role on the trail of the Pony Express.



The Need

With the discovery of gold followed by statehood, the population of California exploded. Half a million Americans lived in the regions west of the rocky mountains. At that time, St. Joseph, Missouri, was the westernmost point which the railroad and telegraph had reached. It was the strategic starting point over the heart of the "great American desert" by way of the direct "Central" route to the west. Except for a few forts and settlements the route beyond St. Joseph was a vast, silent wilderness inhabited primarily by Indians. Transportation across this area on a year-round bases was believed impossible because of weather.

Mail normally took at least a month by boat. When carried by overland stagecoaches, mail between St. Louis and San Francisco took 24 days. This would be the same as if someone wrote you about their Thanksgiving dinner and you did not receive their letter until after Christmas (not much different as today!)

The people of California were eager for news from their many family and business connections back east. Increasing political tensions leading to the Civil War made it imperative to keep the far west, with its treasures of gold, in the Union.



The Founders

To meet these demands for a more dependable source of information, the stage and freight company of Russell, Majors, and Waddell proposed a mail relay service between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California. Historians disagree on who had the first idea for a western Pony Express. However, it was William H. Russell, in conferences in Washington, D.C. in early 1860 with California's U. S. Senator William Gwin, then Chairman of the Senate Post Office and Post Roads Committee, was responsible for putting the Pony Express into operation.

On January 27, 1860, Russell dramatically wired his Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, office that he had resolved to start the Pony Express -- "time: 10 days."

Preparation for the mammoth undertaking was a masterpiece of organization.

Pony Express

Mail service operating between Saint Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California, inaugurated on April 3, 1860, under the direction of the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company.

At that time, regular mail delivery took up to three weeks to cross the continent. The Pony Express carried mail rapidly overland on horseback the nearly 2000 miles between St. Joseph and Sacramento; the schedule allowed ten days for the trip. The mail was then carried by boat to San Francisco. Stations averaging at first 25 miles apart were established, and each rider was expected to cover 75 miles a day. Pony Express riders were usually lightweight young men, often teenagers. Special saddle bags that could be moved to a fresh horse very quickly at a change station were used. Buffalo Bill was a famous Pony Express rider.

Eventually, the Pony Express had more than 100 stations, 80 riders, and between 400 and 500 horses. The express route was extremely hazardous, but only one mail delivery was ever lost. The Pony Express is credited with helping to keep California in the Union by providing rapid communication between the two coasts. News of the election of Abraham Lincoln to the United States presidency in 1860 and of the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861 reached California via the Pony Express. The regular Pony Express service was discontinued in October 1861, after the Pacific Telegraph Company completed its line to San Francisco.

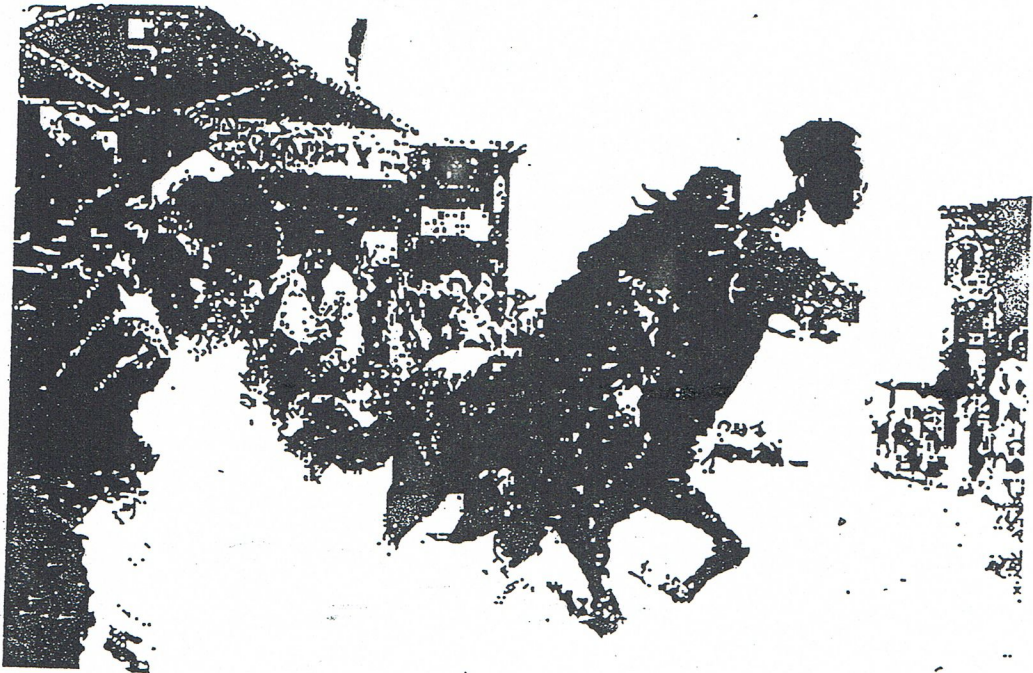
The Pony Express was developed by William H. Russell, William B. Waddell, and Alexander Majors. Financially, the Pony Express was a failure, leading its founders to bankruptcy. However, the drama surrounding the Pony Express made it a part of the legend of the American West.⁽¹⁾

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Last Updated December 2, 1997 by [Chad Goodsell](#)

1. 1. "Pony Express," *Microsoft® Encarta® 97 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1996 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Pony Express Information



Purpose:

To provide the fastest mail delivery between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California. To draw public attention to the central route in hope of gaining the million dollar government mail contract for the Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company.

Date:

April 3, 1860, to late October 1861.

Mechanics:

Relay of mail by horses and riders. The Pony Express ran day and night, summer and winter.

Riders:

183 men are known to have ridden for the Pony Express during its operation of just over 18 months.

Rider Qualifications:

Ad in California newspaper read: "Wanted. Young, skinny, wiry fellows. Not over 18. Must be expert riders. Willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred." Most riders were around 20. Youngest was 11. Oldest was mid-40s. Not many were orphans. Usually weighed around 120 pounds.

Riders Pay

\$100 per month.

First Riders:

Johnny Fry was first westbound rider from St. Joseph. Billy Hamilton was first eastbound driver from Sacramento.