

America's Archives

Often enchanting stories of our country's historic documents (including ones that are postally related)—and how things that may have once seemed rather ordinary can turn out to be national treasures. On other occasions, they immediately become artifacts of history the minute they were created.

The story of America's letters & mails: A sampling of the artifacts.

No. 1.] [Sep. 16th, 1858.

OVERLAND MAIL COMPANY.

THROUGH TIME SCHEDULE BETWEEN
ST. LOUIS, MO., MEMPHIS, TENN. } & SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

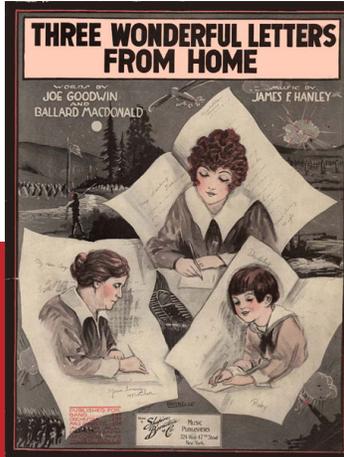
GOING WEST.					GOING EAST.				
LEAVE	DATE	Hour.	Days of the Week	Time of Arrival	LEAVE	DATE	Hour.	Days of the Week	Time of Arrival
St. Louis, Mo. & Memphis, Tenn. } P. H. R. Terminus	Every Monday & Thursday	8:00 A.M.	109	10 30	San Francisco, Cal.	Every Monday & Thursday	8:00 A.M.	Miss. & Return	163 27 0
Springfield	Monday & Thursday	4:00 P.M.	109	10 30	Firebaugh's Ferry, Va.	Tuesday & Friday	11:00 A.M.	163	27 0
Fayetteville	Wednesday & Saturday	7:45 A.M.	143	27 31	Washburn & Saturday	5:30 A.M.	82	18 43	
Fort Smith, Ark.	Thursday & Sunday	10:15 A.M.	100	29 31	Pi Tejon, (via Los Angeles)	Thursday & Sunday	9:00 A.M.	127	29 43
Fort Snark, Texas	Friday & Monday	3:30 A.M.	65	17 31	San Bernardino	Friday & Monday	5:30 P.M.	150	32 43
Sherman	Sunday & Wednesday	12:30 A.M.	205	45	Fort Yuma	Sunday & Wednesday	1:30 P.M.	200	44 43
Fort Belknap	Monday & Thursday	9:00 A.M.	146 1/2	32 45	Gila River, Arizona	Monday & Thursday	7:30 P.M.	135	30 43
Fort Chadbourne	Tuesday & Friday	3:15 P.M.	136	30 44	Tucson	Wednesday & Saturday	3:00 A.M.	141	31 43
Pecos River, (no crossing)	Thursday & Sunday	1:45 A.M.	165	36 44	Soldier's Farewell	Monday & Thursday	8:00 P.M.	184 1/2	41 43
El Paso	Saturday & Tuesday	11:00 A.M.	248 1/2	55 44	El Paso, Tex.	Saturday & Tuesday	5:30 A.M.	150	33 43
Soldier's Farewell	Tuesday & Friday	8:30 P.M.	150	32 44	Pecos River, (no crossing)	Monday & Thursday	1:45 P.M.	248 1/2	53 43
Tucson, Arizona	Monday & Thursday	1:30 P.M.	184 1/2	41 44	Fort Chadbourne	Wednesday & Saturday	1:15 A.M.	155	36 43
Gila River	Wednesday & Saturday	9:00 P.M.	141	31 44	Fort Belknap	Friday & Monday	7:30 A.M.	136	30 43
Fort Yuma, Cal.	Friday & Monday	3:00 A.M.	135	30 44	Sherman	Tuesday & Friday	4:00 P.M.	146 1/2	32 43
Pi Tejon, (via Los Angeles)	Sunday & Wednesday	11:00 P.M.	200	44 44	Fort Smith, Ark.	Monday & Thursday	1:00 P.M.	200	42 43
San Bernardino	Monday & Thursday	1:30 A.M.	150	32 44	Fayetteville, Mo.	Monday & Thursday	6:15 A.M.	65	17 31
Washburn	Tuesday & Friday	11:30 A.M.	127	28 44	Springfield	Tuesday & Friday	8:45 A.M.	100	27 31
Firebaugh's Ferry	Wednesday & Saturday	5:30 A.M.	82	18 44	P. H. R. Terminus (Leave in Louis Mo. & Memphis, Tenn.)	Wednesday & Saturday	10:30 P.M.	143	32 31
San Francisco	Thursday & Sunday	8:30 A.M.	163	27 0		Thursday & Sunday	10:00 P.M.	100	10 16

This schedule may not be exact—Superintendents, Agents, Stationmen, Conductors, Drivers and all employees are particularly directed to see every possible station to get the stages through in quick time, even though they may be short of time.
If they are behind the time, it will be necessary to stop the animals on to the highest speed that they can go, without injury.
Remember that an allowance is made in the time for horses, changing teams, etc. It is therefore necessary that each driver should be quick on the average per hour enough to gain the necessary time for such things, changing teams, crossing horses, etc.
Every person in the Company's employ will always bear in mind that each minute of time is of importance. If each driver on the route here shown (111) minutes, it would make a total time of time, on the route here shown, of twenty-five (25) hours, or more than one day. If each one here on (111) minutes, it would make a total time of sixteen (16) hours, or the best part of a day.
On the contrary, if each driver gains that amount of time, it leaves a margin of time against accidents and extra delays.
All hands will use the great necessity of promptness and dispatch, every minute of time is valuable, as the Company are under heavy bonds if the mail is behind time.
Customers must note the hour and date of departure from Station, the cause of delay, if any, and all particulars. They must also report the same fully to their respective Superintendents.
The Routes referred to in this Notice, are of value over all other Routes.

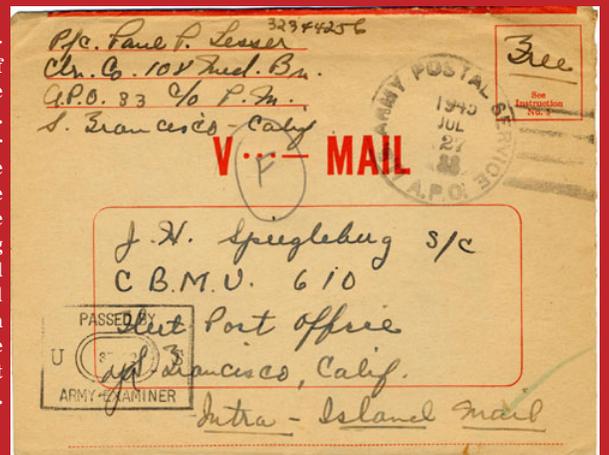
JOHN BUTTERFIELD, Pres.

On March 3, 1857, Congress authorized Postmaster General Aaron Brown to contract for mail service across the trans-Mississippi west. A Kentuckian by birth, Brown selected a route that passed through the southern portion of the territory. The lucrative contract was awarded to John Butterfield's Overland Stage. Butterfield's coaches set out along the 2,800-mile route on September 15, 1858. From the National Postal Museum.

Some of the most historic and unusual mails ever sent were the "adversity mails" of the people living in the Confederate States of America during the Civil War. Even today, envelopes such as the one shown below are still turning up in attics across the South. When people in the southern states began to run out of envelopes during the war, they turned to other handy kinds of paper—like wallpaper and even the blank side of bills they had received. With these papers they handcrafted envelopes. The wallpaper envelope below was sent from Georgetown, S.C. in 1863. (National Postal Museum)



An historic development in the history of America's mails was the "V-Mail" of World War II. Military personnel and their families would each use the special lettersheet/envelope (shown at right) to write messages. After being mailed, the USPOD would microfilm the letters and send them to destinations on huge film reels—there to be enlarged, printed and sent to the recipients.



Fred Schmitt's PERSPECTIVE

(Continued...)

there were 47 letters in all, including five written during the expedition, three written in 1809 after the death of Meriwether Lewis, and letters showing the relationship between Clark and York, the African-American slave on the expedition.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark approached writing in very different ways. Lewis had a literary bent and struggled sometimes with finding the best way to describe something. Clark's approach in the trip journals was "these are the facts," observes James Holmberg, Filson Historical Society special collections curator.

The upshot of all this is that the letters of these two men didn't descend to us as "official documents." They were kept in the families—who, from time to time, found them and donated them to museums or institutions. Some of the descendants were not even aware of the huge significance of their ancestors.

This, of course, points up the importance to anyone who still possesses artifacts from a family's past that one must not take such things lightly—especially old correspondences. On countless occasions, we have surprised people who sell to us with offers that far exceed their expectations.

It pays to keep every family artifact (especially the paper ones!).

Few people realize that, in the 19th century, the federal government drove the price of postage down to just two cents in 1883 in order to promote communications and literacy in our population. This World War I era sheet music carries forward this theme—with the postage at that time still at only two cents! (National Postal Museum)