

California Local Posts, 1849-1856



Emigrants to San Francisco arriving from major eastern cities before 1856 were already familiar with a group of privately owned mail companies, called local posts, that operated within a single city. Typical services offered by these posts included delivery from letter reception boxes to the post office, delivery from a post office to a street address, and the delivery from a box or company's office directly to a street address carried completely outside the U.S. mails. In many cases these posts were one-man operations. With time, the post offices established carrier service by government employees obviating the need for private local posts. However, in San Francisco, no government provided carrier service was available prior to 1868.

This class of private mail-handling company was slow to arrive in San Francisco. The earliest reported mail delivery service was briefly advertised in February 1850 by Charles Kimball, later famous as the "Noisy Carrier." As the express companies dominated mail service within California, it devolved upon that class of company to provide local delivery service at an early date. Henry Reed is known to have been employed by Adams Express as a letter and parcel delivery person prior to February 1851.

Notice of a city dispatch post organized by Berford & Co. Express appeared in the October 12, 1851 *Daily Alta California*:

CITY EXPRESS - We are happy to notice that an enterprise has been undertaken which will prove of great convenience to our citizens. Messrs Berford & Co. intend to establish a city dispatch post. Arrangements have been entered into with the Post Master, by which the concern will have it in their power to procure letters from the post office at the earliest possible moment. Three deliveries will take place during the day, the first at eight o'clock in the morning, the second at noon, and the third at four o'clock in the afternoon. Parcels also can be left at the Express office for any part of the city, as a wagon will make the round of the city daily. Boxes for the city post will be placed in the hotels and other public houses, and letters will be promptly and faithfully delivered. The charge on each letter has been fixed at ten cents. ...

This City Dispatch Post appears again in October 1851 newspaper accounts as being in operation. No postal artifacts have been identified as having been handled by this post.

The previously mentioned Henry Reed began advertising on his own, styled as Reed & Co. City Despatch Post, on December 7, 1853 with his address listed as the Adams Express office. He continued in operation beyond the February 1855 collapse of the Adams firm.

Henry L. Goodwin established his California Penny Post Company on June 25, 1855. In addition to other services, he operated a local post in several California cities until suppressed by the San Francisco postmaster in October 1855. His published rate schedule for San Francisco lists three city deliveries daily. Fees listed include 2 cents for conveying a letter to the post office and five cents for delivering a letter from the post office.

Although additional express companies may have hired delivery people to handle local mail, no other independent local post companies have been identified in the period prior to 1856.