1851 California to Salt Lake City (Chorpenning) Route

In 1851 Absalom Woodward and George Chorpenning were awarded the contract for a monthly mail service connecting California and Salt Lake City as route #12,801. The service was intended to connect at Salt Lake City with the monthly Missouri mails. The eastbound service commenced from Sacramento on May 1, 1851 and arrived at Salt Lake City on June 5, 1851. The first westbound trip left Salt Lake City on July 1, 1851. Later that same year Woodward was killed by Indians and Chorpenning carried out the remaining mail contract without a partner.

The 1851-1852 winter mails were delayed by snow and only the February trip made it to Salt Lake City. After this, Chorpenning received permission from the San Francisco postmaster to send the March mails by steamer to San Pedro (the port for Los Angeles) and thence by the Old Spanish Trail to Salt Lake City. Summer mails of 1852 and 1853 were again carried on the original route via Placerville and Genoa while winter mails were carried on the winter route via San Pedro.

In July 1854 Chorpenning secured a new four year contract that allowed a route change for both summer and winter mails. The new termini were Salt Lake City and San Diego. On July 1, 1858 a new Chorpenning contract with the Post Office Department went into effect. The contract re-established the Salt Lake City to Placerville route and required weekly trips until it was reduced to semi-monthly trips from July 1, 1859. In the interim, on September 15, 1858, the new Butterfield route between Memphis / St. Louis and San Francisco was inaugurated. This service, over a southern route, was semi weekly and the bulk of the transcontinental mails began this route immediately. On May 11, 1860 the contract was transferred to the Central Overland and Pike's Peak Express with semi-monthly service.

Because this route with plagued with mail delays from the start, very little mail was carried. Most of the few surviving covers are uses between California and Salt Lake City.