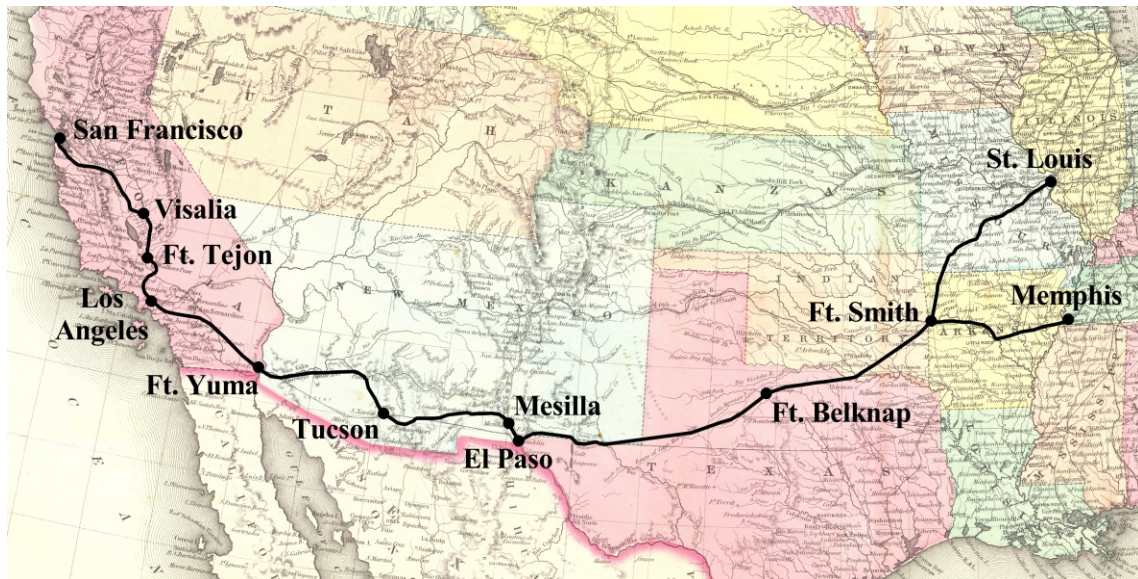


## 1858 San Francisco to Memphis / St. Louis (Butterfield) Mail Route



The Butterfield Southern Overland mail route was a Post Office contract service officially designated as route #12,578. The route was from St. Louis, Missouri, and Memphis, Tennessee converging at Fort Smith, Arkansas, to San Francisco, California twice a week. The contract was let to John Butterfield and Company with service commencing on September 15, 1858 at \$600,000 per annum. Service was to be performed in four horse coaches or spring wagons in 25 days.

Butterfield soon joined forces with other parties to form the Overland Mail Company to fulfill the contract and by March 1860 the Overland Mail Company was effectively under the control of Wells Fargo directors. Following Indian depredations on the route in early 1861, and the looming Civil War, the Post Office awarded the Overland Mail Company a contract on March 12, 1861 for daily mail service over the central route from July 1, 1861.

The last eastbound mail successfully carried on the southern route departed San Francisco on March 27 and arrived at St. Louis on May 1, 1861. The last westbound bounds left St. Louis on March 21 and arrived San Francisco on April 13, 1861. By May 17 the Mesilla, New Mexico Territory newspaper reported that the Overland Mail Company stock of 10 men, 21 coaches, some 200 animals and other vehicles had passed through the town as the company moved resources to the central route.

Covers intended to be carried on the Butterfield Southern Overland mail route were to bear an endorsement or designation to indicate the sender's preference for the route. On mail originating in California these typically included words such as "Via Los Angeles" or similar. Several different stagecoach illustrated envelopes were produced with route directives which served the same function. A special "Overland" handstamp was also used by some towns and is primarily found on mail received in transit.