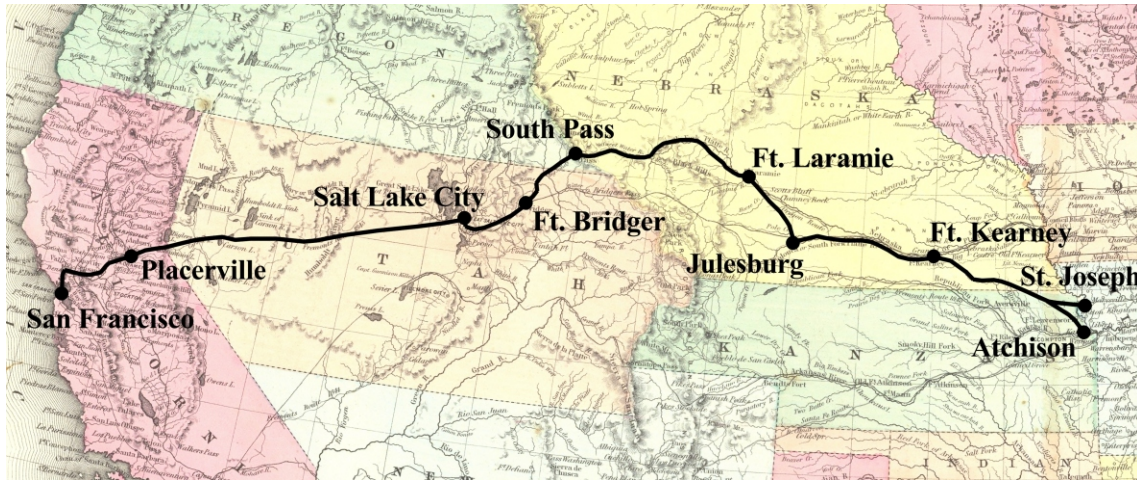


Transcontinental Pony Express Route



The transcontinental Pony Express is one of the most famous institutions in the history of the American West. It first captured the popular imagination while it operated between April 3, 1860 and October 26, 1861, and has continued to do so ever since. From a postal history perspective, the Pony Express was an unusual combination of a private mail system and a government-subsidized mail system that is unique in American history.

The idea for a transcontinental Pony Express began in 1859 when William Russell devised a scheme to transport mail rapidly between California and Missouri using relays of horse mounted riders. Russell persuaded his two partners, Alexander Majors and William Waddell, to institute a ten-day Pony Express private mail service between St. Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento, California. As a demonstration of the viability of carrying mail on the Central Route the Pony Express was a huge success. However, as a business venture, it was a miserable failure, with Russell and his partners incurring large losses. From July 1, 1861, when the Overland Mail Company commenced their daily mail service, the pony express was a contractually mandated premium service.

Summary of the Operational Phases

- I. Operated by the Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Company as a private express (Eastbound April 3, 1860 to April 14, 1861; Westbound through March 31, 1861)
- II. Operated as a joint private operation of the Overland Mail Company and the Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Company with Wells Fargo acting as agent (Eastbound April 15 through June 30, 1861; Westbound April 15 through June 30, 1861)
- III. A government mandated premium postal service operated by the Overland Mail Company in conjunction with their daily overland mail. Wells Fargo provided private service between San Francisco and Placerville (Eastbound July 1 through October 26, 1861; Westbound through October 31, 1861)