

Bannack City Expresses and 1864 Idaho Mines Routes



The Bannack City Express (miss-spelled "Bannock" on one of the two devices he used to handstamp mail) was in operation by February 9, 1863, the date of the earliest reported manuscript endorsement on cover. It was operated by A.J. Oliver, E.A. Conover, and Ed House and originally operated from Virginia City, Idaho Territory via Bannack City, Idaho Territory (both present day Montana) to Salt Lake City where it connected with the government overland mail line. The company operated by coach taking passengers and goods as well as mail. By September 1864 they were operating tri-weekly and included service, via Deer Lodge, to as far north at Kootenai, close to the Canadian border. In the winter of 1864/1865 the service required sleighs and some of their northern routes were eliminated as unproductive. A. J. Oliver is reported to have sold his express to Holladay in 1866.

The Fort Bridger And Bannack City Express was organized by Frank Lowe in 1863 and operated as a pony express. It operated between the overland mail route post office at Fort Bridger, Utah Territory and Bannack City, Idaho Territory by way of Virginia City. Lowe served as one of the two riders carrying mail to Soda Springs where it was turned over to Jim Roupe for onward trip to Bannack City. Mails departed on a weekly basis every Monday from both termini. Service from Fort Bridger was advertised in June 1863 as: "Letters in stamped envelopes fifty cents each" but an August 1863 inbound letter carried by express shows a 75 cent collect rate. The express appears to have operated only during the summer of that year.

At least one additional express, Peabody and Caldwell Express, operated in the same area as the previous two companies but little information is available.

In March 1864 a Ben Holladay and his Overland Mail & Express Company and received a government contract for service between Salt Lake City and Walla Walla, Washington Territory, which already had mail service to Portland. This was a thrice weekly service to commence on July 1, 1864. At the same time a contract for a branch service between the Bannack City mines connecting at Ft. Hall to Holladay's overland route was awarded to E.S. Alvord of the Western Stage Company.