

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Early Mail Delivery

"Early California Mail Bag", the second in the keepsake series of the Book Club of California for 1960 has arrived a bit late but never-the-less an always welcome addition to our reading material. There are six folders in the collection, each folder deals with some phase of California mail during the Gold Rush period. Editors are Edgar B. Jessup, M. C. Nathan, and Henry H. Clifford. The Grabhorn Press, San Francisco, has designed and printed the series. Illustrations were from the collections of Edgar B. Jessup and M. C. Nathan.

"By Pony Express - here was a marking to quicken the imagination of every reader. The idea of a chain of horsemen braving the dangers of the West, night and day, sent a thrill of delight through the Californian of 1860", Mr. Jessup wrote in his notes. The Pony Express was organized in April 1860, by Russell, Majors, and Waddell, a freighting concern, to send mail from St. Joseph, Mo., to San Francisco to prove the feasibility of the Central Route the year round.

Mr. Jessup expresses the opinion that the Pony Express did help to unite the great West with the Union during the first ominous year of the Civil War.

The Pony Express ceased operations late in October 1861, unable to compete with the "talking wires" of the overland telegraph. A letter sent over the Pony line in 1860 cost the sender \$5 per half-ounce. In April 1861, the charges were reduced to \$2 per half-ounce, and on July 1, in conformity with the new law, half-ounce letters were carried for \$1. To take care of these reduced rates adhesive stamps were issued by Wells Fargo in denominations of \$4, \$2, and \$1 and when affixed to letters carried them over the entire line.

Mr. Jessup is president of Western Cover Society. Among the illustrations of the pony mail is a photograph of a letter addressed to Abraham Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois. It bears the San Francisco running horse handstamp. A west bound cover originally from the President Roosevelt collection, bears New York oval and the St. Joseph encircled oval. It was taken off the Pony Express at Sacramento and mailed to Vallejo, addressed to Levi C. Frisbee, M.D.

Basil C. Pearce, secretary of the Western Cover Society, edited the folder on "Overland Mail". The Overland Mail

Coach is now a symbol of a past era, but in its day, it was the most popular institution of the far west.

The folder giving the history of Wells Fargo & Co. was prepared by M. C. Nathan, editor, Western Express, Research Journal for Western Cover Society. He writes: "With capable management and patience Wells Fargo & Co. became the octopus of the express business in the West. It left a great heritage for the future in mail transportation and other services. It honorably played a very important role in the saga of the west."

M. C. Nathan also edited "Early California Local Mail", 10th in the mail series. "As the need for postal service became apparent for California, the Post Office Department in Washington sent out an agent for the purpose of appointing postmasters in the principal centers of population or trade, he arrived in San Francisco by boat without supplies or stamps", Nathan wrote. "Without adequate supplies, the postmasters merely penned the name of the town and date in the left upper corner and the 12% cents in the upper right-hand corner. In case of payment, the word "Paid" would precede the rate. On January 1, 1856, local collect letters were no longer permissible - pre-payment by stamps or stamped envelopes was compulsory."

What a transition has taken place in the last one hundred and ten years!