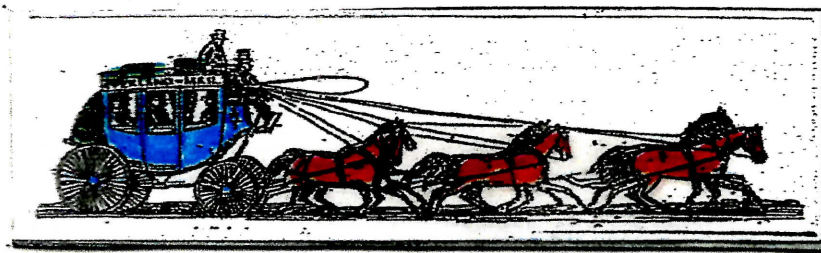


CALIFORNIA

EXPRESS

COMPANIES

1849 - 1895



When the California Gold Rush began in 1849 the U. S. Post Office had difficulty in keeping up with the ever new and changing mining communities. As a result, much of the mail was handled by the more nimble private express companies. Included are the locals which expedited private mail service.

Like the post office, California express and local services started in 1849. They varied considerably, from one-man operations which lasted just a few months to large ones such as Wells, Fargo & Co. which carried mail for decades. Private carriage of mail ended by government order in 1895.

This exhibit shows more than 100 different express/local companies with franking ranging from crude manuscript markings to well printed postal stationery. Those from 1849 and 1850 were pioneers who set the stage for the large multitude to follow. Based on their success the years 1851 to 1854 saw rapid growth and fierce competition. A major change occurred in 1855 with the fall of Adams & Co., which ushered in a period of gradual consolidation, mainly by Wells, Fargo & Co. This was completed in 1869 when Wells bought out Pacific Union Co., effectively gaining complete control of letter express except for a few dozen feeder lines which remained.

The presentation is by the period when each of these express or local companies began operations:

1849 - 1850

THE FIRST YEAR

1851 - 1854

FIERCE COMPETITION

1855 - 1869

CONSOLIDATION

1870 - 1895

**WELLS, FARGO AND
SATELLITES**

Especially significant covers are noted with a

