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PONY EXPRESS: THE MAGNIFICENT FAILURE
REAL WEST

A Charlton Publication

November 35c

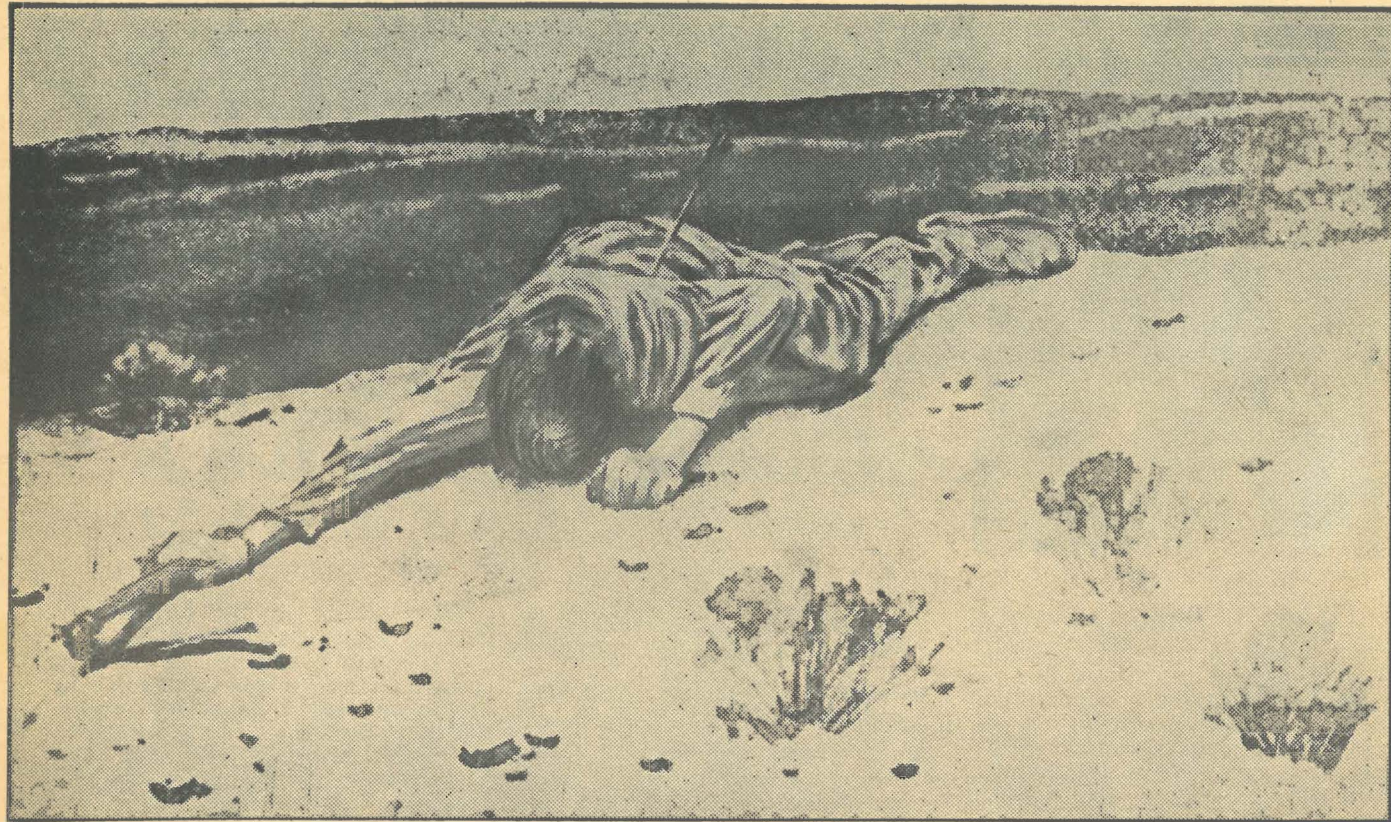
Pony Express

**SOAPY SMITH'S
greatest hoax**

See page 8



HANK TRACY - He killed for fun



TRAGEDY OF THE PONY EXPRESS

There was raw courage and the shadow of death for Pony Express riders, but they were only pawns in the bitter intrigue of this fantastic undertaking.

By Carelton Mays

APRIL 3, 1860, was a day of glory and excitement in the town of St. Joseph, Missouri. Mayor Jeff Thompson had finished a two hour oration. Bands were playing and flags were waving. Then came the booming roar of a cannon. A small man wearing red pants and a blue shirt, sitting in a funny looking saddle on a powerful horse, dug his spurs into the animal's flanks and the horse leaped forward.

The two headed for the ferry at Jules Street were a boat would take them across the Missouri. Once across the river the little man would start on one of the most famous rides in history.

Historians do not agree on the name of this rider.

Some say it was Billy Richardson, others contend it was Alex Carlise, while still others stick to the name of Johnny Frey. The name wasn't important. What was important is that at the same time, 2,000 miles to the West, in San Francisco, another rider, wearing red trousers and a blue shirt sat on a horse in front of the Alta Telegram Company.

Bands were playing and flags flying and a great crowd was cheering wildly as the rider sent his horse down the street for the ship, "The Antelope," which would take him to Sacramento and the beginning of his long ride.

This was the start of the famed Pony Express, which has come down to us as a glorious saga of reckless

courage, imagination, and amazing feats of riding.

There was bravery and romance in the Pony Express, a lot of synthetic glory, but history has carefully avoided giving us the other side of the picture — the duplicity and deceit, the political chicanery that reached a new low, and the double dealings and crookedness that led to the indictment of three prominent citizens for fraud and theft.

No businessman at the time gave the Pony Express any chance to succeed. All considered it nothing more than sheer folly. The men that died in this folly were merely pawns in a struggle between three powerful and ruthless personalities for power, wealth, and fame.

These three were John Butterfield, William Russell, and the incredible Ben Holiday. With the discovery of gold in California in 1849, the need for a route to the West Coast became apparent. John Butterfield was the first to establish a freight and stage coach line between St. Louis and San Francisco. He chose the southern route, which was longer but which missed the high mountain ranges and the terrible winter storms.

WILLIAM RUSSELL had chosen the northern route, shorter but more difficult in the winter. Russell had as partners the stolid and religious Alexander Majors and the wealthy William Waddell. The headquarters of the freighting company of Russell, Majors, and Waddell was at Leavenworth, Kansas. Their headquarters was an impressive sight, one that caused Horace Greeley, on his trip West, to write glowing praise in the New York Tribune.

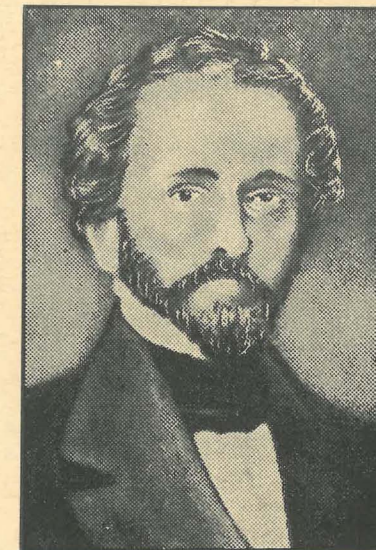
There were acres of big wagons, thousands of animals, and an army of men. Wheels, harnesses, iron tires, spare axles — everything necessary to such a huge business. Six thousand teamsters were on their payroll and they owned 45,000 oxen. Their equipment was valued at two million dollars.

Russell, Majors, and Waddell had eliminated all small freight companies, under bidding them and crushing them with little concern for ethics. The personality of the three partners were interesting. Russell was a small bantam-like man, tricky, ruthless, with the soul of a con man. John Majors was a sedate and stern, Bible shouting Methodist. Waddell was a neutral character. He had been brought into the firm in the early days because of his money and ability to get financial backing.

John Butterfield, profited from the trade between Santa Fe, New Mexico and Independence and St. Louis. While his assets didn't equal those of Russell, Majors and Waddell, he did have an advantage over them because he was a close personal friend of President James Buchanan.

The plum that both companies were dangling for, and which meant great profits, was the mail concession to California. Buchanan favored Butterfield and the first government contract to haul the mails to California was awarded to his company. The government's first payment was \$125,000. The mail service started with every promise of success, but the Apaches caused it to fail.

AS Russell, Waddell, and Majors fought with Butterfield over a mail contract, the third man in this war sat on the side lines, eyeing his two competitors and waiting with the deathly ruthlessness of a jungle beast to spring the minute one of them made a mistake. This man was Ben Holiday. In that year of 1858 he didn't figure too greatly in the overall picture of the freight



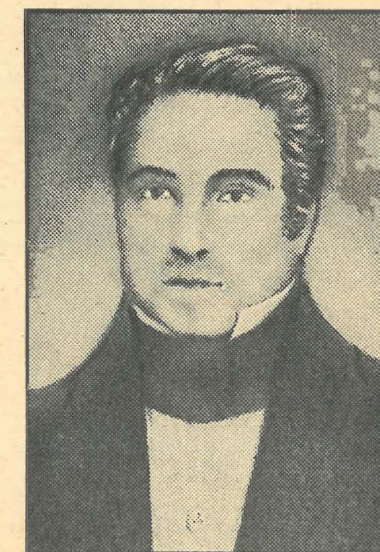
W.H. Russell was behind idea of Pony Express.

and stage coach business in the West. He did have a freight service and was one of the few small companies who had refused to sell out to Russell, Majors, and Waddell.

Holiday was rich and possessed infinite patience. He dreamed of owning a stage coach line, but he wasn't spending fortunes bucking two such powerful companies as Russell, Majors, and Waddell and Butterfield. He was willing to wait until one made a mistake that would let him take the company over.

Russell made the mistake when he came up with the
(Continued on next Page)

John Butterfield was ruined by undertaking.



wild idea of a Pony Express. Actually, it wasn't Russell's idea. The plan had first been suggested five years before by Ben Ficklin, the California superintendent of Russell, Majors, and Waddell, to Senator William M. Gwin of California on a trip the two made to St. Louis.

Senator Gwin was a pompous politician, who like all of his kind, boasted of far more power and pull in Washington than he really had. He wanted a closer connection between California and the East and he had orated at length in Congress for better and faster mail service.

The germ of the idea for the Pony Express came from the famous ride of Francis Xavier Aubry, who rode 800 miles from Santa Fe to Independence, Missouri, in five days and thirteen hours. Gwin and Ficklin agreed this record offered the idea of a mail service, but nothing was done until five years later when Russell hit upon the idea as a plan to wrest the government contract from Butterfield.

Russell was in Washington, trying to get Senator Gwin to use his influence to get him and his partners the mail contract. The Senator told Russell he would have to come up with something daring and suggested the Pony Express.

Russell was a gambler, tricky and often flighty in his business deals, but he had enough business acumen to know that such an undertaking was doomed to financial failure. Senator Gwin agreed, but told him that once he got the mail contract, he could discontinue the Pony Express and haul the mail in stage coaches. The Senator made the point that the very daring of the Pony Express would catch the imagination of country and the government would have no choice but to award the mail contract to Russell's company.

When Russell returned to Leavenworth and presented his plan to his partners they were shocked and put

thumbs down without hesitation. Russell argued in his excited and high-pitched voice. He brought Senator Gwin to his aid, and finally when the Senator had assured them that the Pony Express would bring government contracts for mail, they reluctantly agreed.

RUSSELL, Majors, and Waddell were not in a good financial condition for this undertaking. Despite their huge business, Russell had lost them considerable money in his stage coach line to the Pikes Peak country. It was a good idea at first, but the Pikes Peak's bubble burst, leaving Russell and his partners with a large amount invested in stage coaches and no place to go.

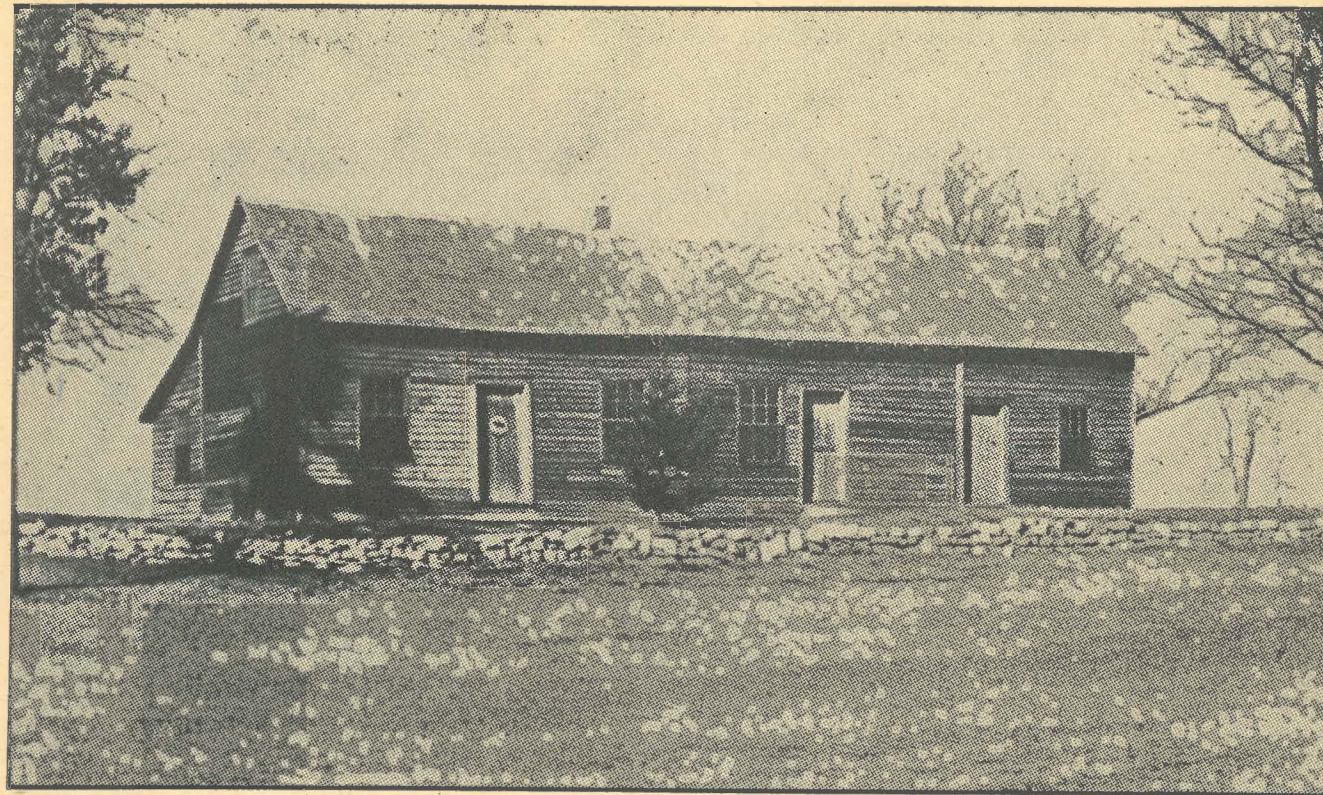
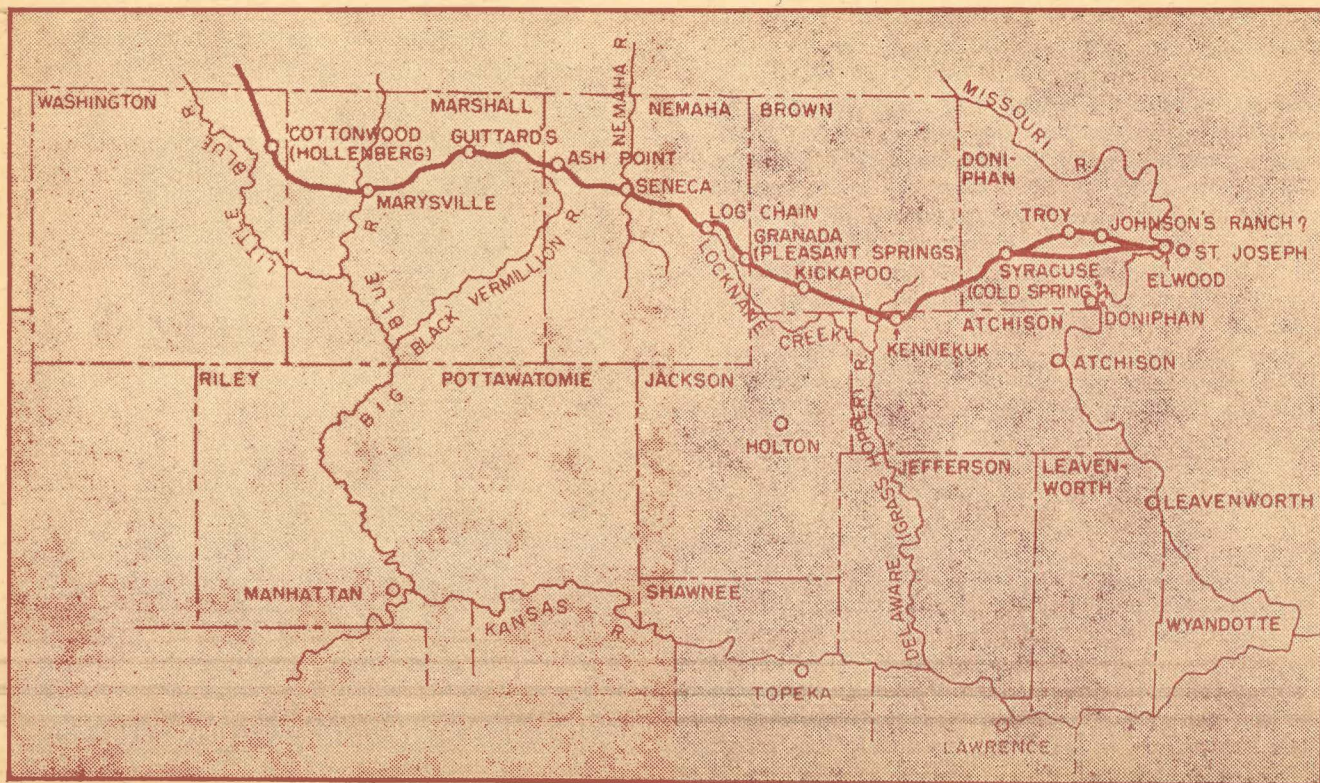
It was at this point that the incredible Ben Holiday stepped into the picture. His spies in Washington related the information that Russell and his partners had little chance to get a mail contract. Butterfield had the prestige and power of such organizations as the Wells Fargo Express Company, the big Eastern banks, and other powerful influences.

So Holiday threw his lot in with Russell, Majors, and Waddell, ostensibly to help them but actually in one of the biggest double crosses in the history of the West. Holiday had the money and Russell and his partners needed financial help. They looked on Big Ben as a good friend, a man they could trust. Unfortunately, they knew little about him.

It was a vast undertaking to prepare the route for the Pony Express. Way stations had to be built every ten or fifteen miles. Hay and feed had to be carried there. Ben Holiday talked Russell into abandoning part of their freight route where they had stations in favor of the Platte River route, which meant new stations had to be built.

Money was one thing Holiday had — that and his dream of one-time owning the Russell, Majors, and

Map of the Pony Express across Kansas, showing the important stations at the beginning of the ride.



Pony Express station at Hollenburg Ranch near Hanover in Washington County, Kansas, is still in same location.

Waddell company. Eighty Pony Express riders had to be hired. John Majors handled this. He advertised for young men, preferably orphans, willing to ride through storm and danger for \$25.00 a week.

Horses chosen for these riders had to be large and faster than any Indians' ponies. Majors went to California where he arranged for the purchase of a number of half breed California mustangs, descendants of the Moorish horses brought over from Spain and possessing all the wiry toughness and speed of their ancestors.

Israel Landis, who ran the St. Joseph Saddlery, made the saddles and equipment for the riders. He saddle was nothing more than a skeleton with a padding. The leather mail sack, known as a *mochila*, was a leather blanket of the finest kid and thrown over the skeleton saddle. This *mochila* had pockets for the mail and the riders sat on it, with two pockets in front of his legs and two behind.

Alex Majors, the shouting Methodist, made each rider sign this pledge, "I promise while in the employ of A. Majors, not to use any profane language, not to get drunk, not to gamble, not to treat animals cruelly, and not to do anything else that is incompatible with the conduct of a gentleman."

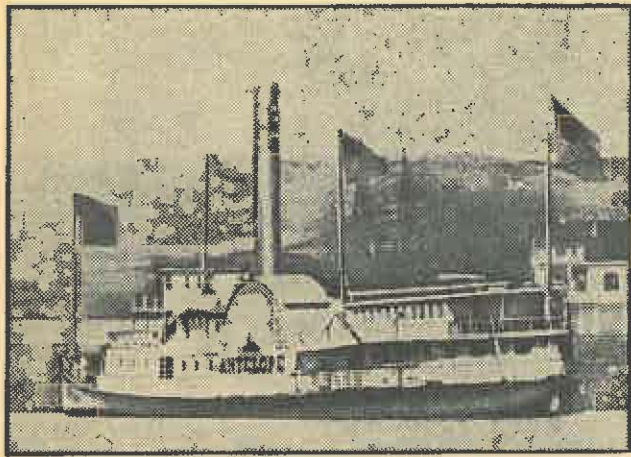
These youngsters not only had to sign this pledge, but they had to listen to two hour lectures on clean living and morality once a week. Despite the need for no excess weight on the horses, Alex Majors insisted that each rider carry a leather-bound Bible in the *mochila*.

THE route selected for the Pony Express was through several of the northeastern Kansas countries into the Platte River country of Nebraska, across Wyoming, and then into the great salt basin desert and over the rugged Sierra mountains, two thousand miles of the most dangerous country in the West.

Russell's ballyhoo for the great day when the Pony Express would start had a touch of P. T. Barnum in it. Russell overlooked nothing that would increase the mass interest in the undertaking. The New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago papers carried columns on it, (Continued on next Page)

Pony Express saddle was designed by William A. Gates.





The ANTELOPE which carried Billy Richardson across river to Sacramento on the first lap of his famous ride.

with details supplied by Russell, and on that day of April 3, 1860, St. Joseph was packed with newspaper men, celebrities, and thousands who had journeyed from the East to witness the historical event.

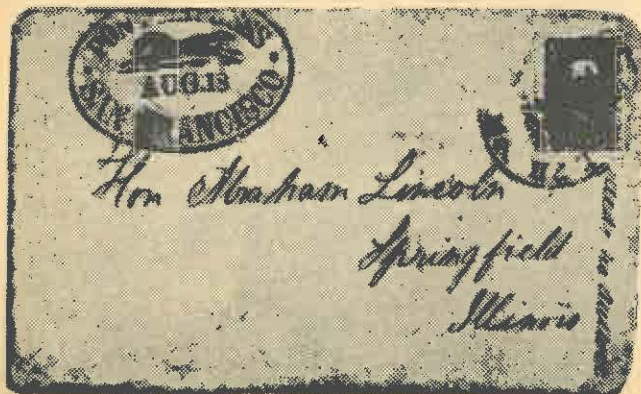
Along that route were stations every ten or fifteen miles. The distance between stations was called a "stage." The riders would travel at breakneck speed between the stations, leap from one horse to another, and then cover the distance to the next station on a fresh mount.

Each rider rode from fifty to 125 miles, depending on the terrain to ride over. At the end of his run, he rested at the station for the rider coming from the West and to take over from him. The nation waited with breathless interest the outcome of the first rides. There were no radios or televisions to record the runs of the riders. There were no telegraph wires to send reports of the riders' progress.

The public had to wait in silence for the news. It broke on April 16, 1860, with the Leavenworth (Kansas) Times, the first to break the story, and from Leavenworth telegraph wires carried the story to every city in the East.

"An amazing marvel has been accomplished," "the Times story read. "The Pony Express has galloped half way across the continent. History will record this event as one of the gigantic enterprises of our day . . .

Letter addressed to A. Lincoln was written on tissue paper and enclosed in ten cent government envelope



The distance was made in *nine days and twenty-one hours.*"

The public was thrilled, but President Buchanan and Congress showed no inclination to share this feeling. Senator Gwin to carry out his promise to Russell orated loud and long but nobody listened to him.

And, Russell, who staked everything on the government coming to his rescue, must have known that he and his company were doomed and he had dug their grave. The first riders from San Fresno carried mail amounting to \$425.00 in postage, which was five dollars an ounce. This was only a drop in the bucket to the expense of making that run. Russell's partners pleaded with him to throw up the whole idea, take their loss, which they could have done then and survived.

Russell was stubborn. He was still dreaming of a million dollar government contract, which Senator Gwin assured him he would get. He turned to his old friend, Ben Holiday for help. Holiday, watching every move with an eagle eye, was happy to help. He told Russell's two partners to hold on and success would come.

Holiday played his cards like a master poker player. He maneuvered to get his brother-in-law, Bela Hughs elected to a high office in the firm of Russell, Majors, and Waddell. Holiday advanced money without asking for a mortgage. Russell, Majors, and Waddell looked on him as a true and loyal friend. He was all that, but a friend with a dagger in their back.

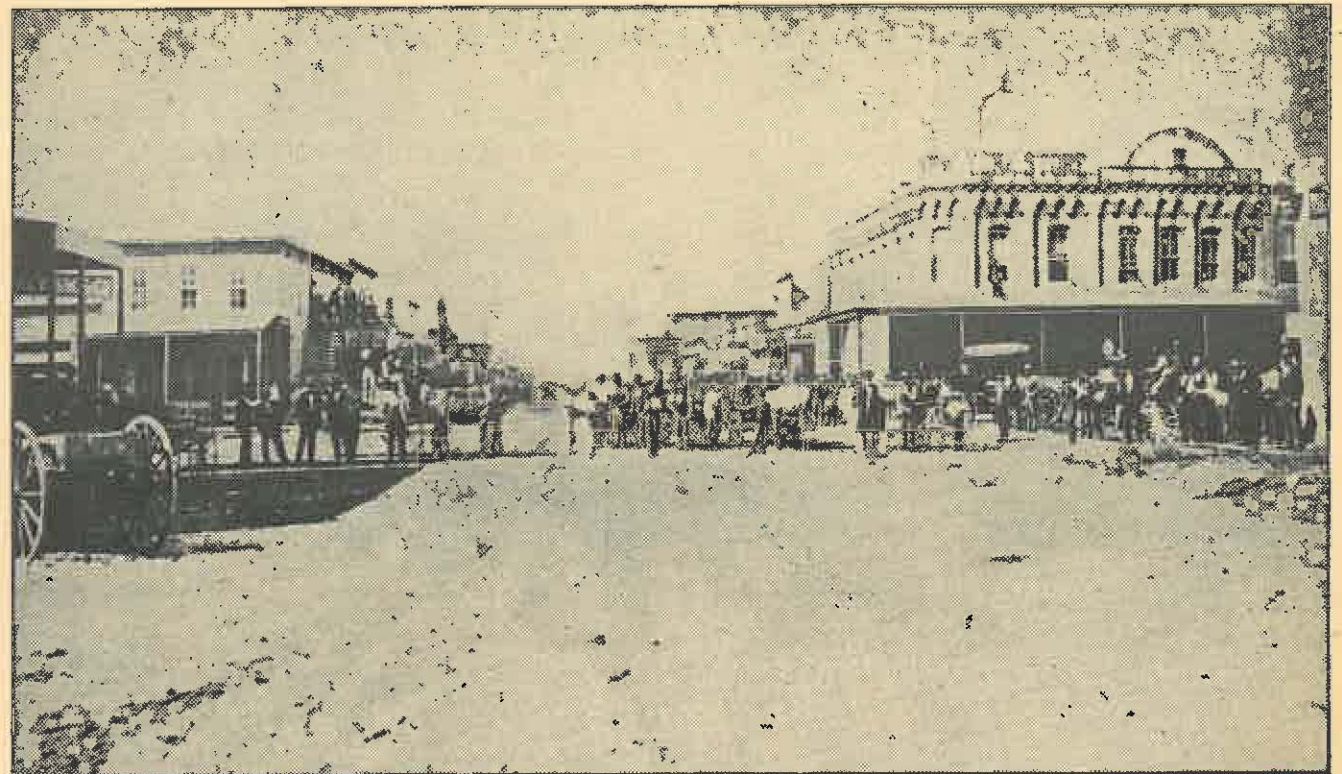
THEN new trouble hit the Pony Express. On May 24, not quite two months after the Pony Express started, Jim Bateman, a rider, came over a hill in sight of the Carson Valley station in the Washoe country in Nevada. As Bateman neared the station, he saw only the charred remains of the buildings. Three men were dead outside the burned building. Bateman kept on riding until he got to the next station, where he leaped on a fresh mount and continued on to carry the news of the attack on the Carson Valley station.

In the next week Indians had attacked and destroyed every station between Carson and Diamond Springs. Russell called for help from the United States Army. The Army promised a token force, which didn't appear. Major George Ormsby, a retired army officer, called for volunteers. One hundred and five men answered the call and the Major with these volunteers started after the Indians. On June 12th Major Ormsby and his volunteers got to a bend in the Truckee River, sixty-five miles from Virginia City.

They saw no sign of Indians and marched from a narrow pass, with high cliffs on each side. Then suddenly these cliffs exploded with the roar of hundreds of rifles. A number of volunteers fell. Major Ormsby ordered a charge. This was a futile effort. The Indians hiding behind rocks mowed down the volunteers. A bullet hit the major in the head and he fell with most of his skull blown away. The survivors leaped behind rocks, but the battle was unequal. There were five hundred Paintes on those cliffs. The survivors ran out of ammunition. Only ten escaped with their lives when night fell.

The massacre of Major Ormsby's detachment roused that part of the West. The Army was called on for help, but again all they promised were token forces. It was charged that, back in Washington, Butterfield and his allies were using their influence to prevent the Army from coming to the rescue of the Pony Express.

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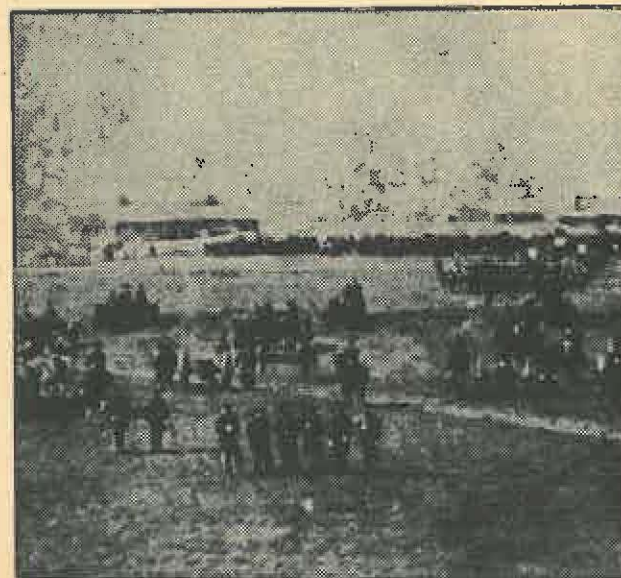


Main street in Wichita in the 1870s when Jack Ledford came to the town to open one of the leading hotels.

Such a figure as Ledford naturally did not remain idle in a fast-growing town. It was not long before he rose to the position of a substantial businessman. Jack Ledford was 25 when he married Alice Harris, age 16, in January of 1871. Those who knew the bride stated she was a pleasant, good-looking young girl, and who had quickly fallen under the charms of the debonair Ledford.

At that very time, at N. Main and 3rd Streets in Wichita, there was an elaborate building being built. Jack Ledford bought the building. He called it the

Troops from Fort Harker arrived in Wichita to carry out vengeance of Jack Bridges, army scout, against Ledford.



HARRIS HOUSE in honor of his wife, one of the best houses in Wichita at that time.

There was gossip at the time that Ledford got the money to buy the building from highway holdups. Nobody ever knew this for a fact, and in his life time no crime was ever proved against him. The events leading up to his battle with the United States Army are as confusing as Ledford was himself.

It was known that the summer before, he and Deputy U. S. Marshal Jack Bridges had had a fight where the Kansas Pacific Railroad was extending its tracks north of Wichita, and Ledford had given the burly Bridges a bad beating. Bridges had sworn to get him for the beating, but as the months passed Ledford forgot Bridges.

Then on February 5, 1871, Bridges suddenly appeared in Wichita. He met Ledford face to face in the Moose Saloon. Bridges apparently didn't want another fight, and he was too smart to try to draw on Ledford. He stalked angrily out of the saloon and rode out of Wichita.

The end of February, 1871, was at hand, and Jack Ledford had found a month of business at the Harris House quite profitable and pleasant. While not a common occurrence, sometimes February in Kansas is a mild month. And so it was on February 28th, a bright and sunny Tuesday, that the young Ledford stepped from his hotel about 4:00 that P. M. and crossed the street and entered the saloon of his friend, George De Moose. He had no particular reason for going there, possibly just to talk over things or buy his friends a round. At any rate Jack was not expecting trouble for he was not wearing his familiar .44's nor his cartridge belt.

About that time, unknown to Ledford, a troop of the 5th U. S. cavalry from Fort Harker, rode down the main street of the frontier town. At their head was Captain

(Continued on Page 64)

PONY EXPRESS

(Continued from Page 12)

The Indians struck again and again. Station after station was destroyed and the stationmen and their helpers killed. In San Francisco, Ben Ficklin, manager of the Pony Express in the West, raised an army with funds of the company.

Colonel John Hayes was in command. General Clark finally sent his token force, 40 soldiers under Captain Stewart. Colonel Hayes had six hundred volunteers, all paid by Russell, Majors, and Waddell. He met 300 Indians at Carson Valley and defeated them. They retreated to Pyramid Lake where they were joined by more Indians.

In the battle Colonel Hayes and his army of volunteers, with the 40 army men, cut the Paintes to pieces and chased them far away from the Pony Express. It cost Russell's company \$75,000 in cash for that army of volunteers.

THE Pony Express started again. New station houses were built, this time of stone with holes for rifles, and each station was heavily supplied with ammunition and food. The Pony Express riders were covering the two thousand miles in ten days and less, but their mail pouches didn't carry many letters. The miners in California apparently didn't love any lady enough to pay five dollars to get a letter to her. On August 1, 1860, the price for mail was reduced to \$2.50 a half ounce. This didn't increase the mail. Russell and his company were losing \$60,000 a month.

Russell went to New York to get money from Eastern bankers. They turned him down. In Washington Russell was told Congress would soon vote on a million dollar mail contract for California. Senator Gwin assured Russell he would fight to the end for the contract to be given to Russell and his company. By this time Russell knew his chances were slim, almost hopeless, but it gave him one hope to cling to frantically.

But Russell needed money. The company was tottering on bankruptcy. He found a strange ally in John B. Floyd. Secretary of War. Floyd's sympathies were wholly with the South and already war clouds were appearing on the horizon. The South hated Butterfield and his company. Floyd cared nothing for the North and to him anything to hurt Butterfield would help the South.

Floyd and his wife, who hated the North with the same bitterness as her husband, contacted Russell. Floyd suggested that he would issue government vouchers to Russell, which he could use to get credit. Floyd was playing an under-the-table-game against the North with Russell his stooge.

These vouchers helped, but didn't correct the financial condition of the company. Russell was desperate. He threw all caution and all sense of morality out of the window. He began speculating on the stock market with the company funds and lost heavily. Floyd would issue more vouchers, just enough to keep Russell afloat. Business for the Pony Express remained bad. The price per letter was reduced to one dollar. By this time Russell and his

partners had lost over a million dollars on the gamble for a mail contract.

Butterfield's spies kept him posted on things in Washington, and it was believed they knew what Floyd was doing and Butterfield told them to keep quiet and give Russell enough rope and he would hang himself. Ben Holiday also kept his eyes on things and was waiting for the trap he had set for Russell to close on him.

And while these three men lied and cheated in one of the biggest double crosses in history, the riders of the Pony Express and the stationmen were risking their lives daily for they were nothing more than pawns in the greedy hands of Holiday and Butterfield.

Robert Haslam, known as Pony Bob, knew nothing of the real meaning of

First advertisement for Pony Express mail gave cost \$5 for each half ounce.

PONY EXPRESS.

Nine Days from San Francisco to New York

THE CENTRAL Overland Pony Express Company will start their LETTER EXPRESS from San Francisco

to New York and intermediate points,

On Tuesday, the 3d day of April next, And upon every Tuesday thereafter, at 4 o'clock P. M.

Letters will be received at San Francisco until 3 3/4 o'clock each day of departure.

OFFICE—

Alta Telegraph Office, Montgomery st.,

Telegraphic Dispatches will be received at Carson City until 6 o'clock P. M., every Wednesday.

SCHEDULE TIME FROM SAN FRANCISCO TO NEW YORK.

For Telegraphic Dispatches.....Nine Days For Letters.....Thirteen Days

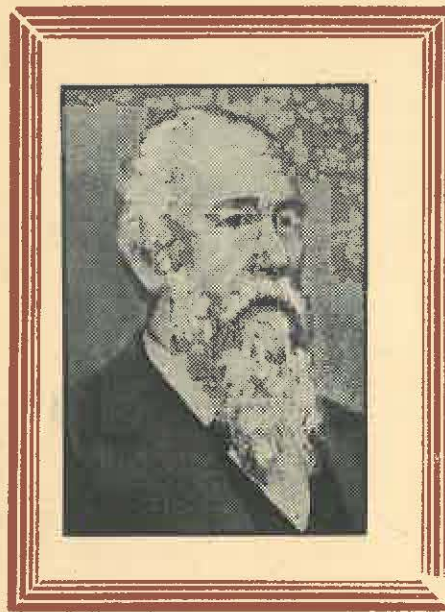
Letters will be charged, between San Francisco and Salt Lake City, \$3 per half ounce and under, and at that rate according to weight.

To all points beyond Salt Lake City, \$5 per half ounce and under, and at that rate according to weight.

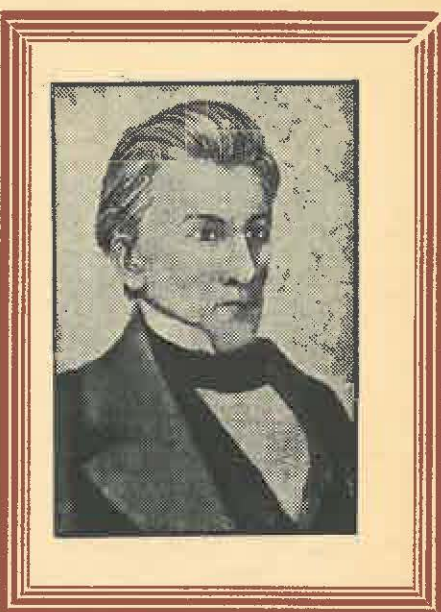
Telegraphic Dispatches will be subject to the same charges as letters.

All letters must be inclosed in stamped envelopes. WM. W. FINNEY, Agent C. O. P. E. Co.

m18



Hymn-singing Majors opposed Russell.



Senator Gwin didn't do as he promised.

A second arrow went through his arm. He pulled it out, but his arm began swelling. Blood was gushing from his mouth and the pain in his jaw made him dizzy, but he kept riding, outdistancing the Paintes. He didn't stop until he had ridden thirteen horses a hundred and twenty miles in eight hours to deliver his important papers.

There were other daring rides by such famous Pony Express riders as Gus Cliff, Henry Wallace, Alex Carlise, Billy Frey, and Billy Richardson. The longest ride is credited to Bill Cody, Buffalo Bill. There is one error about Bill Cody. He never was a Pony Express rider. He was too young, only 14 at the time, but he was a great favorite of Alexander Majors and he rode with Majors along the route, and it was during one of these rides that he took the horse of one of the regular Pony Express men and covered 322 miles in a round trip to Red Buttes.

THE fast horses of the Pony Express riders saved their lives. Only one rider, a Johnny Pate, was killed by the Indians. The victims of the Indian raids were the station-masters and their helpers and in the year and a half of the Pony Express over forty of them met their death.

These deaths were of little concern to Russell, Butterfield, and Holiday as the climax of their three-way struggle

the Pony Express when he started on his long ride through Nevada with important news dispatches. He didn't see the Paintes Indians waiting for him. They came out of nowhere, but Haslam's horse was strong and swift and he got the jump on them. Arrows whizzed around his head. Then one hit him in the mouth, knocking five teeth out and fracturing his jaw.

for power came nearer. Russell had to have more vouchers. Floyd obliged by writing out vouchers totalling \$666,000.00. Russell was nervous about taking this amount to a banker.

He called on his friend, Holiday, offered him the vouchers for what he and his partners owed Holiday, a little over \$300,000. Holiday knew that as

(Continued on next Page)

This Pony Express station at Seneca, Kansas, was operated as a hotel by John. E. Smith and had conveniences of era.



the innocent purchaser of the vouchers, he couldn't be held responsible how Russell got them. So he not only cancelled the debt, but offered Russell more cash.

Russell made him promise that he would hold the vouchers as security and not try to cash them. Holiday countered with the demand Russell and his partners give him a mortgage on the company and all its assets. They protested, but Holiday insisted and they had no choice.

Losses from the Pony Express in-

creased and by July 1861 Russell, Majors, and Waddell were unable to meet slight drafts when they became due. Floyd issued more vouchers, but he couldn't issue enough. Then into the picture stepped one Goddard Baily, a law clerk working in the Interior Department and a cousin of Mrs. Floyd.

Why he stepped into the crooked dealings is shrouded in mystery. He had in his office negotiable bonds of the Indian Bureau, held in trust for Indian tribes. Baily turned over to Russell \$150,000 of these bonds. This

didn't help much and a week later Russell was back and Baily gave him \$300,000 more.

Within a month Russell had gotten \$870,000 of these bonds. Then the storm broke. It was discovered that the bonds were missing and Baily was arrested. He told the police he had given the bonds to Russell at the request of Floyd. Baily, Floyd, and Russell were arrested. They got out on the bail. Floyd fled South where he became a general — and not a good one, in the Confederate Army.

Russell pleaded innocent and agreed to redeem the bonds. Action against him was never pressed. The scandal killed any hope he and his partners had of getting the million dollar mail contract being considered in Congress. It was awarded to Butterfield. It was rumored in Washington that Butterfield financed the defense of Baily in the theft of the bonds and got him free, which left the impression in Washington that the spies of Butterfield could have had something to do with Baily turning over the bonds to Russell.

RUSSELL and Majors turned to Ben Holiday for help. They asked him to return the \$666,000 in vouchers they had put up as security for his loan. They explained that he had a mortgage on their company.

Holiday feigned surprise that Russell believed he had given him any vouchers as security, calling his attention to the fact there was no written record of any such transaction. Russell sued Holiday, introduced evidence that Holiday had cashed the bonds in Oregon to purchase the franchise of a steamship line. Holiday won out in court because Russell could not produce any written evidence he had given Holiday the vouchers.

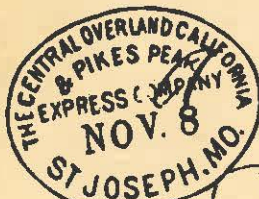
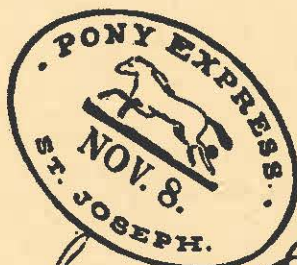
Russell, Majors, and Waddell were bankrupt. Holiday closed the trap he had set for them. At a bankruptcy sale he bid \$100,000 and got all the wagons and equipment of Russell's company. After a year and a half the Pony Express ceased to be, but its short life had served Butterfield and Holiday well. It got Butterfield a million dollar mail contract and Holiday the Russell, Majors, and Waddell freighting company. With it he became known as the King of the Stagecoaches in the West.

And what of those poor devils who died in the stations of the Pony Express and fighting to make that experiment a great success.

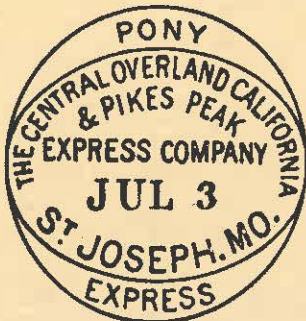
Their bones bleached white on the deserts and in the mountains, a grim and sad reminder of man's inhumanity to man

Top letter carried news of election and lower letter was to Holiday.

*Election News.
Lincoln elected.*



*Benham Eq
Sulesburg
for the Rocky Mountain crew
5 Env st.*



RW