

THE PONY EXPRESS

In 1860, this advertisement began to appear in the United States.

Who in the world would answer an ad like that? The answer is, anyone who wanted to ride for the Pony Express.

RIDERS WANTED

Young, skinny, wiry fellows. Anxious for adventure and chance to see our great WEST. Must be expert riders, willing to risk death daily.

Orphans preferred.

The Pony Express Delivers the Mail

Hundreds of thousands of Americans now lived in the West. They felt isolated from their eastern friends and families. They also were slow to get news from the East. The fastest way mail could reach westerners was by stagecoach. And, that took three weeks or more!

Then, some businessmen thought up a new way to deliver the mail. They would use fast riders and fast horses to gallop the mail across the country. They promised that, using this "pony express," they could deliver mail from St. Joseph, Missouri to California in just ten days! St. Joseph was the starting point because the trains ended there.

To get ready for the start of the Pony Express, the businessmen bought 400 horses and hired 80 riders. They built about 190 way stations along the trail that the riders would use. At these way stations, fresh horses and fresh riders would await their turn to carry the mail.


President Lincoln and the Pony Express

The inaugural address given by new President Lincoln was delivered to California by the Pony Express. The address was considered so important that for that ride, the horses were changed every 10 miles along the route. Because of this, a copy of President Lincoln's speech took only 7 days, 17 hours to arrive in California.

The Pony Express was similar to a relay race. However, in a relay race, a baton is passed from one runner to the next. Instead of passing a baton, Pony Express riders passed on saddlebags holding about 20 pounds of mail bound for California.

The race began when one man jumped onto a horse and rode as fast as he could to the next way station. There were way stations every 10 to 15 miles or so. There, he would leap off his horse and jump onto a fresh horse that was waiting for him. Then, he would ride again for all he was worth to the next way station, and then to the next.

PONY EXPRESS!

CHANGE OF TIME!  REDUCED RATES!

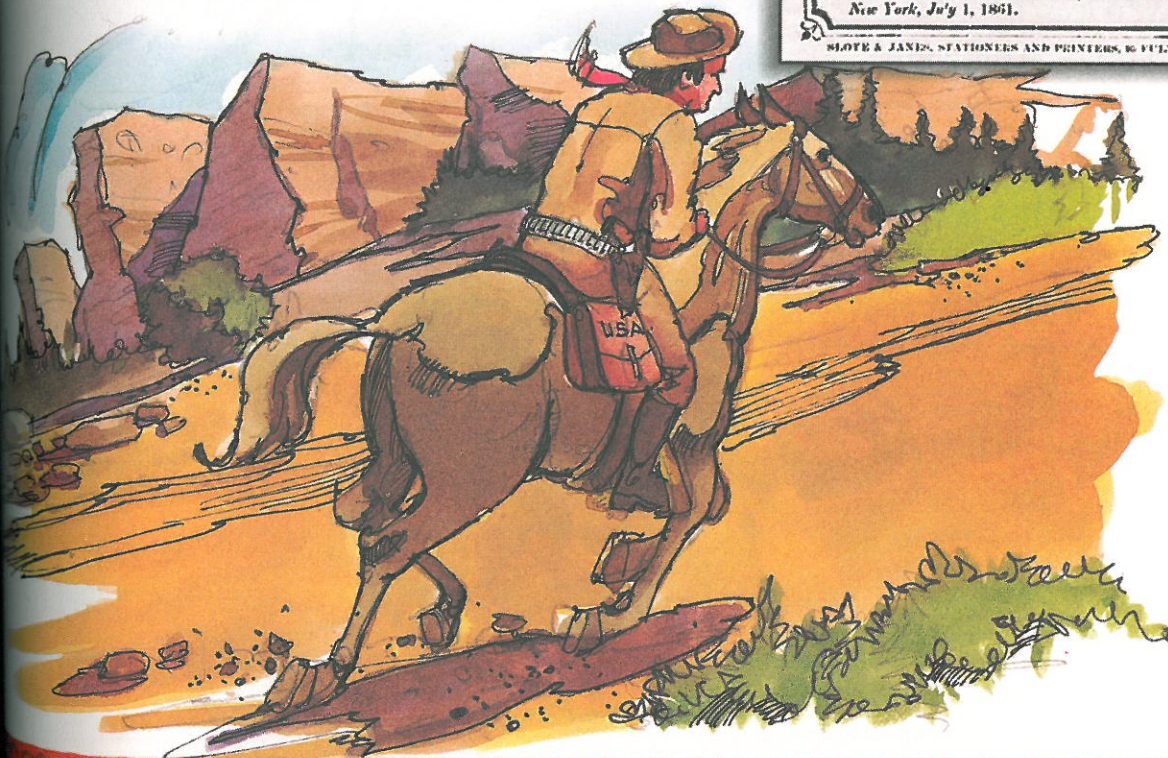
10 Days to San Francisco!

LETTERS
WILL BE RECEIVED AT THE
OFFICE, 84 BROADWAY,
NEW YORK,
Up to 4 P. M. every TUESDAY,
AND
Up to 2½ P. M. every SATURDAY,
Which will be forwarded to connect with the PONY EXPRESS leaving
ST. JOSEPH, Missouri,
Every WEDNESDAY and SATURDAY at 11 P. M.

TELEGRAMS
Sent to Fort Kearney on the mornings of MONDAY and FRIDAY, will connect
with PONY leaving St. Joseph, WEDNESDAYS and SATURDAYS.

EXPRESS CHARGES.
LETTERS weighing half ounce or under.....\$1 00
For every additional half ounce or fraction of an ounce 1 00
In all cases to be enclosed in 10 cent Government Stamped Envelopes,
And all Express CHARGES Pre-paid.
137 PONY EXPRESS ENVELOPES For Sale at our Office.
WELLS, FARGO & CO., Ag'ts.
New York, Ju'y 1, 1861.

BLAKE & JAMES, STATIONERS AND PRINTERS, 86 FULTON STREET, NEW YORK



When he had traveled between 50 and 100 miles, he found another, rested rider waiting for the mail he carried. He gave his mail bag to the new rider, who galloped off to cover his portion of the trip as fast as his horses would take him.

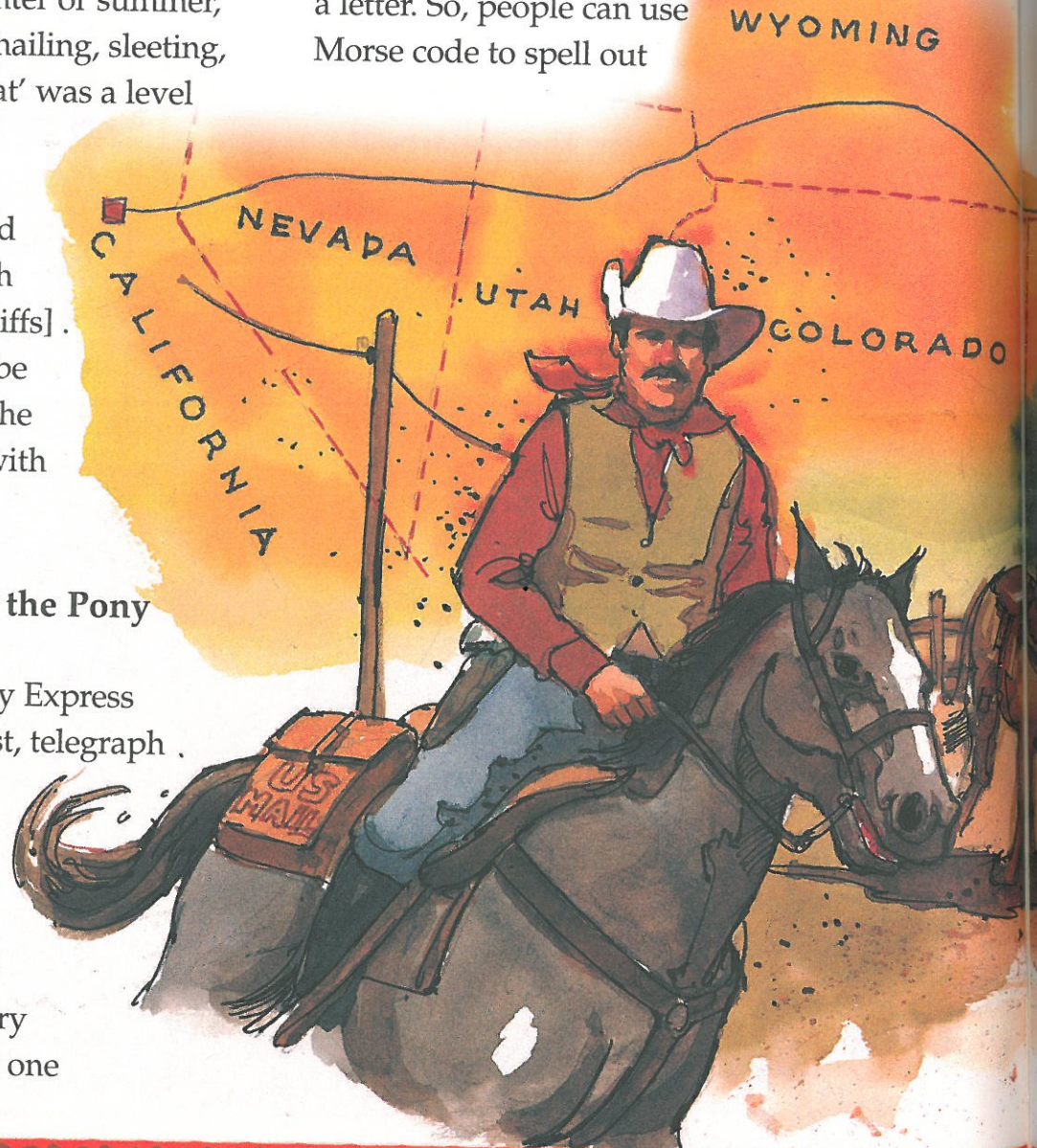
American writer, Mark Twain, described the job done by a Pony Express rider as follows: "No matter what time of the day, or night his watch came on, and no matter whether it was winter or summer, raining, snowing, hailing, sleeting, or whether his 'beat' was a level straight road or a crazy trail over mountain crags and precipices (PRE suh puh suhz) [steep cliffs] . . . he must always be ready to leap into the saddle and be off with the wind!"

The Last Ride of the Pony Express

Even as the Pony Express riders galloped west, telegraph wires were being strung between the big cities of the East. Here is how a telegraph works: Telegraph wires carry electricity. People at one

end can interrupt the flow of electricity in the wire. People at the other end of the wire can hear the interruptions as clicking sounds on a telegraph key.

A code called Morse code was used to send messages over telegraph wires. Morse code is made up of dots and dashes—short and long interruptions in the electricity flow. Each dot-and-dash combination stands for a letter. So, people can use Morse code to spell out



messages to each other over telegraph wires.

Few people thought a telegraph wire would ever span the country. In fact, President Abraham Lincoln called the idea “next to impossible.” After all, telegraph poles would have to be raised over plains, deserts, and mountains. Three thousand miles of telegraph wire would have to be connected to the poles.

Despite these challenges, on October 24, 1861, telegraph wires and poles reached from New York

City to San

Francisco. Now, messages could be sent across the continent in a matter of moments, instead of in the ten days it took the Pony Express riders.

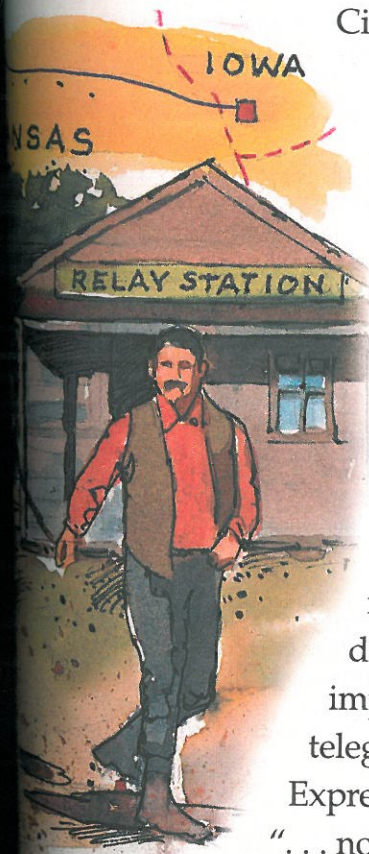
One Kansas

newspaper described the impact of the telegraph on the Pony Express:

“... now the Pony had become a thing of the

past—his last race is run. Without sound of trumpets, celebrations, or other noise demonstrations, the slender wire has been stretched from ocean to ocean. . . .”

Two days after the first message was telegraphed across the country, the Pony Express business closed down forever. It had lived less than 19 months. But, in that short time, its riders rode 650,000 miles to help connect one end of our big, sprawling nation with the other.



Show What You Know

Here is a secret word, written in Morse code:

.... ---

Use the chart on this page to figure out what the word is. (Hint: The word appears in this reading!) Then, use Morse code to write your own name, or to write a secret message about the Pony Express. Ask a friend or a family member to figure out what you have written.

A	..-	N	---	0	-----
B	....	O	-----	1	-----
C	....-	P	....-	2-
D	---	Q	-----	3-
E	.	R	---	4-
F	....	S	...	5	....
G	---	T	-	6	-----
H	....	U	---	7	-----
I	..	V	....-	8	-----
J	....-	W	....-	9	-----
K	---	X-		
L	....	Y	-----		
M	--	Z	-----		

The Pony Express carried mail across land with few roads or towns.