

The Pony Express:
A Bridge Toward the Advancement of
Communication

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Paper

The Pony Express was a quick and extremely efficient mail delivery system for its time. and has changed communication in many ways (Bensen pg. 5). Senator William Gwin of California created it, along with William H. Russell. The Pony Express was hacked by Russell's large freighting firm, and his business partners. Alexander Majors and William Waddell, who agreed to help their friend with his project of trying to make a successful communication system for their country (Fetzer pg 657-658). It took an average of ten days for the Pony Express to deliver the mail across the United States from Sacramento, California to St. Joseph, Missouri. and another ten days to get from St. Joseph, Missouri to Sacramento, California (Carpenter, January 4, 2005, Fetzer pg.657-658).

The Pony Express was created for a few reasons. One of those reasons was that since California had been annexed from Mexico, the Americans immigrated into the west in search of land and property. About one year after California was annexed gold was discovered at Sutter's mill on January 24, 1848 (Bensen pg 134). Since gold was worth so much, and there was a lot found in California, people moved into the Californian territory hoping to strike it rich in a time known as the gold rush. The following year in 1850, the American government decided to make California a part of the United States. After the government made California a state, people flooded into California, making the population rise by about 20,000 people a year! The reason that these people needed a fast communication system was that they left their families back at the east coast while they were living in the west and these families wanted to stay in touch with each other. They did have other ways of communicating across the United States back then, such as the steamboat. Like every other way of communicating back then, the steamboat took a very

long time to deliver its post. If you were to send a letter through the steamboat in December, and the weather was good, you might get a reply in July if you were lucky. The reason that the steamboat took so long was because it had to go down and around Cape Horn, which is at the tip of South America, to get to the other side of North America. During the last few months, the Pony Express only delivered government dispatches and other very important information because so many things had been happening during that time, that people had been interested in, like the civil war (Smith pg 1). Other things that the government letters and dispatches said were presidential elections and instructions for the defense of state.

Another reason that the people demanded a faster communication delivery system was because of the civil war. The civil war was important to the Californians because they cared what was going on in the war. The Pony Express was also needed during the civil war because it kept the government in the west in touch with the armies of the east. (Adams pg 138-F41)

The Pony Express consisted of young men and boys from ages eleven to eighteen, weighing less than 120 pounds (National Pony Express Association Original Pony Express Trail from 1860 ad). A day's ride was about 75 miles per person, but sometimes the riders would have to travel many more miles because their relief riders may have gotten sick, may have been killed by attacking Indians as they awaited to ride, or they may not have shown up at all. In that case, those riders would have to carry their mail an extra 75 miles to make up for the other person's absence. The riders carried a mochilla on the backs of the horses. A mochilla was a saddlebag with two pockets on each side, which contained the mail. All the riders together covered more than 200 miles a day.

through all kinds of weather, along with the threat of Indian attacks. These men and boys carried letters, packages and other dispatches bringing information across the country. (Fetzer pg 657-658). This delivery system operated from April 3, 1860 to October 24, 1861 (Settle pg. 2002). It was ended by the completion of the telegraph, which sent and received. Messages in a four-hour time span. This made the Pony Express seem like a snail compared to a cheetah (Lambert pg 5, Sacramento Bee, Settle pg 105, Fetzer pg 657-658). Remarkably, even within that short period of time, the Pony Express was the driving force leading to the advanced postal delivery system we have in our modern life today (Carpenter. January 4, 2005).

During its eighteen month working span, the Pony Express advanced America's communication system. For one thing, it definitely speeded up the amount of time it took to get mail across the country (Carpenter. January 4. 2005). It demonstrated to people how much organization was needed to make a successful business of any kind, which helped to advance and brighten their future (Bensen pg. 5). Another way that the Pony Express helped communication was that it pointed out to the government the central route across the country. The Pony Express proved to the government that the central route was passable and safe for other means of transportation (Carpenter. January 4. 2005).

The final way that the Pony Express advanced communication was that it made people realize that information was extremely crucial. Without knowing what was happening on either side of the country. or even in the northern or southern part of your own state, they could be living in a world of puzzlement and confusion. (Carpenter, January 4, 2005)

Before the telegraph was completed, the Pony Express was the fastest delivery system of its time (Crews pg. F-43). Even though it only carried government dispatches, the Pony Express still broke records for delivering mail in an average of ten days. The stagecoach took about 21 days to deliver its post across the United States, and the steamboat took an average of six weeks to deliver, for it had to travel down and around South America (Carpenter- January 4, 2005, The Oregon Trail and the Pony Express"). Comparing the Pony Express to the stagecoach and the steamboat- it is clear that the Pony Express was a more expeditious way to deliver. (Carpenter, January 4. 2005, The Oregon Trail and the Pony Express)

More important than speed and the amount of time it took to deliver the mail was the organization and all of the effort that was put into it. If no one put any effort into making the Pony Express ride smoothly, then the Pony Express probably wouldn't even make it past the first station (Carpenter. January 4. 2005). William Russell. Alexander Majors and William Waddell were all in charge of collecting the supplies needed and making sure that everything went as according to plan ("F he Oregon Trail and Pony Express"). Before long. Russell. Majors. and Waddell had brought together 420 top quality Indian horses. 80 riders. The riders were paid \$5 for each letter that weighed an ounce. or they were paid \$100 to \$F50 a month. They also provided station keepers- stock tenders, and route superintendents. Home stations. which were the stations where the riders switched, so that a new rider would be continuing the journey, were located every 60 miles. Swing stations. which were the stations that the tired- hungry and thirsty horses were replaced with fresh and energetic new horses, were located around every eleven and three fourths miles (Fetzer pg. 657). In addition to getting all of the supplies needed. there

were plenty of jobs to be filled. Some one had to keep track of finances. Another person had to keep track of the stagecoaches carrying the normal post, while making sure that the Pony Express was up and running within the time limits. Finally someone had to go to Washington DC to secure government contracts. It was a lot of work, but the people of the west were demanding a faster communication system. (Carpenter. January 4, 2005)

For each postal delivery, the Pony Express went across the central route to reach its destination. With each Pony Express rider who made it safely to his destination, the government started to take more notice in this particular trail. They took into consideration how perfect the central route was, and how perfect it would be for future delivery systems. The central route was a perfect trail because it was the fastest way to get across the United States at the time. One thing that was built along the central route was the remaining part of the telegraph. Another thing that was built over that trail was the Transcontinental Railroad. Those two historical sites would not be located where they are today if it hadn't been for the Pony Express. (Carpenter, January 4, 2005)

The Pony Express showed everyone not only how much better it was to get information and to communicate. but also how crucial it was to be getting information faster. Those government papers were very critical for people throughout the country because they announced an abundance of information. Some of the information in the dispatches included presidential elections and information on the Civil War. The more information people read in the newspapers, and each time they communicated to their families across the Unites States. it made them even more thankful for a swift postal delivery system. (Carpenter. January 4. 2005)

The Pony Express has done a lot to get us to where we are today. with mailboxes on every street corner and post offices in every city and town. Even for the two-day delivery system we have today, we can thank the Pony Express. But the Pony Express was more than a step up to a more advanced communication system. It was a legend. It was a legend of bravery along with a speedy dispatch delivery system. It was also a legend of daring ambition, because the Pony Expresses creators, Russell, Majors, and Waddell. risked everything they had and owned to make the Pony Express a success, so that the country could have a better communicational system. (Carpenter, January 4, 2005)

It wasn't just the owners who made the Pony Express a brave and daring enterprise, it was also the riders. The riders who rode for the Pony Express gave up their homes and normal jobs to help the United States become a more advanced society. But the riders didn't just give up their jobs and homes. They risked their *lives* to help their country and its people to get the news and information across America so that their country's communication systems could advance in ways they could never imagine (Carpenter, January 4, 2004). The Pony Express riders were often confronted by the skillful and cunning Indian tribes, who were constantly trying to keep the Americans off their land. The Indians wanted to keep the land to themselves and their countless clans. Although only one person was killed by the Indians, many of the riders still carried a pair of pistols and a knife along with them on their long ride to their destination. The Pony Express riders also confronted scorching desert heat, and freezing blizzards to travel 75 miles or more (H. von Schmit 1979 newspaper clipping). The post offices motto "neither

snow, nor rain, nor death of the night can keep us from our duty" originated from the Pony Express. (Carpenter, January 4, 2004)

Although the Pony Express has not been in use for about 144 years, it is still remembered throughout the country. In my hometown of Folsom, right behind the Folsom History Museum is a watering hole. This is where the horses from the Pony Express would be given water and food during their rest break. Right next to the stream, there used to be a stable and stall, but it was taken down a long time ago. The volunteers at the Folsom History Museum take pride in the fact that this museum was built on the same ground as one of the swing stations from back in 1860. Because of their pride and honor, these volunteers are going to build a statue of a Pony Express rider and his horse with a plaque on it in memory of the great days of the legendary Pony Express. (The volunteers from the Folsom History Museum)

Bibliography

Primary

Carpenter, Larry. Telephone interview, 4 January 2005. Larry Carpenter is the Secretary of the National Pony Express Association. His role in my report is very important because he told me the majority of the ways that the Pony Express advanced communication.

Crews, Tom. "The Story of the Pony Express As Published in the Newspapers" www.xphomestation.com. National Pony Express Association, 11 Nov. 2004. This website is very important to my report because it has a number of newspaper articles from 1860 and 1861, which gave me an abundance of information. The information this website gave me was about the amount of time it took to deliver the mail.

Lamburt, Marjie. Sacramento Bee, June 23, 1985. Marjie Lamburt's newspaper article told me about the speed and pace that the Pony Express traveled at.

National Pony Express add from 1860. This add showed me the requirements needed to be a Pony Express rider.

Volunteers from the Folsom History Museum. February 5, 2005. The volunteers from the Folsom History Museum helped me in my report by telling me a great deal about the Pony Express and what they were planning to do to the backyard of the Folsom History Museum. I would not have found this information in the books.

Secondary

Adams, Samuel. The Pony Express. New York, NY: 1950. In this book I found out why the Pony Express was needed and why the people were demanding a faster communication system. I also found out what was inside of the letters and why they were so important to the government.

Bensen, Joe. The Travelers Guide to the Pony Express Trail. Helena, MT: Falcon Press, 1995. This book helped me write my report by telling me about all of the organization and planning that went into the Pony Express and the information on why the Pony Express was created.

Fetzer, Scott. "Pony Express" World Book 2002" Chicago, IL: World Book Inc., 2002. This encyclopedia told me what the Pony Express delivered, and the amount of time it took to deliver the post.

Settle, Raymond and Mary. Saddles and Spurs: the Pony Express Saga. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1955. This book showed me the date of which the Pony Express operated from and how it was ended.

Smith, Jesse. Sketches of Old Sacramento. Sacramento, CA: 1976. From this book I found out the time period of which it took to deliver mail by the Pony

Express and steamboat, and why it was important to communicate across the country.

“The Oregon Trail and the Pony Express”. Video Archive. 25 Jan. 2005. This video showed me all of the jobs that it took to keep the Pony Express running.

von Schmidt, H. The Pony Express: The Fastest Run in the West Panarizon Publishing Corp. 1979. This newspaper clipping told me what the Pony Express riders had to deal with on their delivery routes.

Watkins, T.H. California: An Illustrated History. Palo Alto, CA: 1973. In this book I found out the date that California was founded, and why people decided to move to California after it was founded.