

**EVOLUTION OF THE NEW 1855  
TEN CENT TRANS-CONTINENTAL  
RATE FOR OVER 3,000 MILES,  
FROM SAN FRANCISCO AND THE  
CALIFORNIA GOLD MINING AREAS.**

**Due to extensive original research  
for almost half-a-century,  
this entire presentation is copyrighted  
by John Birkinbine II, 2014.**

**The 1855 10¢ trans-continental rate change went fairly smoothly in the east, south and central United States. But in the far west it really became a problem.**

**San Francisco was the major ocean port and thus contained the major post office on the west coast. It was the hub for receiving and dispersing mail to and from all the northern California towns with the east coast and with foreign countries.**

**This is the story of the evolution and development of this rate usage using postage stamps and postal stationery, focusing initially on San Francisco, then followed by the gradual growth into the various western gold mining towns in the mountains.**

## **THE NEW TEN-CENT RATE**

- **The Postmaster General's "Instructions to Postmasters" was dated March 12, 1855.**
- **The earliest successful sailing date to either Panama or Nicaragua was the by the "Illinois", departing New York March 20 and arriving at Aspinwall (Chagres), Panama, on March 29.**
- **Crossed the Isthmus to Panama City and departed on the "Golden Gate" March 31, arriving in San Francisco on April 12.**
- **This notification of the new stamps would have been received and read by the San Francisco postmaster on April 12 or 13.**

**LAST DAY OF 6¢ TRANS-CONTINENTAL RATE**  
**FROM THE WEST COAST, MARCH 31, 1855**



**Letter dated March 30, 1855. Cancelled March 31.  
Departed San Francisco on the “John L. Stephens”, March 31.  
One day before the April 1 change in rate to 10¢.**

**FIRST DAY COVER, APRIL 16, 1855  
NEW 10¢ TRANS-CONTINENTAL RATE**



**San Francisco post office received  
information on 10¢ rate on April 12.**

# FIRST DAY COVER, APRIL 16, 1855



**Clerk originally used regular cancel,  
then switched to the inclusive "10" device.**

# FIRST DAY COVER OF FOREIGN INTERNAL RATE CHANGE



**April 16, 1855, First Day from San Francisco  
for the April 1, 1855, 29¢ British Treaty rate.**

**The British 29¢ rate was effective July, 1851.  
Thus the external postage rate was unaffected,  
but the internal composition was different as of this date.**



**Various combinations of stamps and postal stationery were used to make the 10¢ rate. After a while post offices ran out of both the stamps the and envelopes.**

# **NEW TEN-CENT POSTAL STATIONERY**

**Issued by the Post Office April 25, 1855.**

**A quantity was promptly purchased by a Hawes Express Company agent and carried aboard the “*Northern Light*” departing New York, April 27.**

**Arriving at San Juan del Nord, Nicaragua, May 6 and crossing to San Juan del Sud he boarded the “*Sierra Nevada*” May 6, for a delayed departure May 11 to San Francisco.**

**It is probable that this agent was T. Giles, who left San Francisco March 24 and arrived in New York April 15.**

## USED FROM NICARAGUA



**Either used by the agent on May 7, or else private forwarders Morgan & Hathaway Co. may have represented Hawes Express Co., purchasing the new envelopes to sell to travelers.**

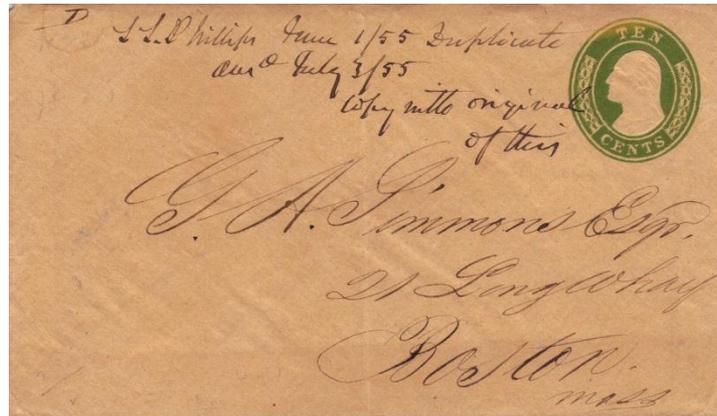
**Carried by forwarder's agent to San Juan del Nord and placed aboard the "*Star of the West*", May 22.  
Arrived New York June 1, postmarked June 2.**



**REVERSE**

**Hawes Express Co. hand stamped frank,  
and M.H. Co. (Morgan Hathaway) red wax seal.**

# EARLIEST 10¢ POSTAL STATIONERY FROM SAN FRANCISCO, JUNE 1, 1855



**The first sailing date after Hawes Express Co. agent arrived aboard the “*Sierra Nevada*”, on May 26 with the new envelopes. Hawes charged 12½¢ for franking.**

**J. Hawes Express Co. frank on reverse. Via Nicaragua, arriving Boston July 3. Hawes beat the post office by 37 days in bringing the new 10¢ postal stationery.**



**June 16, 1855, is second earliest use by Hawes Express Co. The only known copy with a Hawes Express Co. marking on the front. The reverse also contains this express marking.**

**Handwriting and docketing indicate a different sender from the previous covers, proving the envelopes were not carried into San Francisco by a private party.**

# EARLIEST CALIFORNIA CANCEL ON 10¢ ENVELOPE



**San Francisco, June 16, 1855.**

**The date and sender duplicate the previous cover carried by Hawes Express.  
Duplicate correspondence was used to assure receipt of important messages.**

**10¢ envelopes were not in the San Francisco post office.  
This was purchased from Hawes Express Co.**

# EXAMPLES OF PRE-10¢ ENVELOPE USAGE



**San Francisco, June 20, 1855.**  
**Sender did not have to prepay postage.**  
**Hand stamped "DUE 7" for trans-continental rate.**



**June 16, 1855, San Francisco.  
Same date as previous cover.**

**Usage shows normal make-up for the ten cent rate,  
in the absence of 10¢ stamps and envelopes.**



**June 30, 1855. Single 10¢ paid, but was overweight.  
The 10¢ stamps had not yet arrived, and no room for additional  
small denomination stamps, so hand stamped "DUE 10".  
Proves the 10¢ stamps were not in the post office.**



**July 15, 1855, was one day before the normal ship departure cancellation date. Occasionally a busy postal clerk would take liberty with the date.**

**Old 6¢ trans-continental rate paid by stamps. Stamps ignored, clerk hand stamping “DUE 10”.**



**PROOF THAT MAIL RECEIVED AFTER JULY 1, 1855, WAS HELD AT THE SAN FRANCISCO POST OFFICE, THEN CANCELLED ON SHIP DEPARTURE DATE.**

**Honolulu, June 16, 1855, departed June 17 on the "Vaquero", arriving at San Francisco July 4. Held until next ship departure, July 16, then cancelled that day. July 16 was same departure day for the First Day of U.S. 10¢ stamp.**

## 20¢ INTERIM RATE COVER



**The new 10¢ stamps arrived at San Francisco July 13 on the “*John L. Stephens*”. They were placed on sale July 13 or 14. Thus there was a 13 to 14 day interim posting period between June 30, 1855, when the previous outbound steamer had departed San Francisco and when the new stamps became available. Had the envelope not been pre-franked, 10¢ stamps would have been used.**

**The July 16 sailing was the last day when combination franking's were theoretically necessary. Double weight 20¢ postage made up of available smaller denominations.**

## 30¢ INTERIM RATE COVER



**Sender placed 20¢ in single stamps on envelope knowing it was overweight, but post office determined triple rate requiring 30¢ postage. 10¢ cash paid and window clerk, having no 10¢ stamps and no space for more lesser stamps, penciled “30”, later applying red hand stamp “PAID 30”.**

**Posted during the 13 to 14 day interim period between June 30 and July 14. Held for cancelling until ship departure, July 16.**

# FIRST DAY COVER OF THE NEW 10¢ STAMP FROM THE WEST COAST, JULY 16, 1855



**The new 10¢ stamp was available only two days prior to the mail closing. First Day cover, July 16, 1855, Types II and III 10¢ stamps plus two 3¢ stamps, making the 26¢ rate from U.S. west coast to France. Arrived Lyon, September 5.**

**Single rate from U.S., but rated as double weight in France due to inconsistencies in resolving weights between decimal and metric systems in postal treaty.**

**U.S. west coast inland postage 10¢. Sea postage American packet to England 16¢. Total for single rate prepaid 26¢. Transit postage through Great Britain 3 decimes. French inland postage 5 decimes. Total 8 decimes unpaid. Over 7.5 grams = double rate applied outside U.S. = 16 decimes (32¢) due from recipient.**

**FREEMAN'S EXPRESS IMPORTS 10¢ POSTAL STATIONERY**



**Earliest known Freeman's cover using the 10¢ envelope, July 31, 1855.**



**July 31, 1855. Vallejo was apparently the second California town to obtain the new 10¢ stamps.**

**EARLIEST CALIFORNIA USAGE OF THE**  
**TYPE 2 "SHORT LABEL" 10¢ NESBITT ENVELOPE**



**February 28, 1856, Gibsonville.**

**A stampless cover with this date is also known, indicating the very recent receipt of 10¢ envelopes.**

**As of January 1, 1856, stamps or stationery was required for complete pre-payment of postage.**

# **CALIFORNIA PROVISIONAL SURCHARGES**

- **Practically all the towns in northern California were mining towns. Being a postmaster was a secondary job, and not very remunerative. The distance, transportation factors, primary occupation, and postmaster procrastination resulted in delayed ordering and receipt of the new 10¢ stamps and postal stationery. A few delays ran up to eight months!**
- **Due to transportation charges to the west coast, envelopes requiring postage were costly. Great preference was given to the postal stationery since there was no envelope cost.**
- **But post offices could initially sell the new 10¢ envelopes only in bundles of 100, this being changed to bundles of 25 a few months later. The only purchasers would be the few express companies and large mercantile firms. Since postmasters were instructed to purchase three month's supply at one time, many attitudes were "Why bother?" It would be much simpler to use the old 3¢ and 6¢ envelopes by adding a few stamps to make up the new 10¢ rate.**
- **Thus the easy to use Provisional Surcharges were created by many postmasters, but for a limited time.**

**The California Provisional Surcharges occur only on entire government envelopes, since these are over-all watermarked and considered security paper. The individual indicia was not a recognized as a security item by the government since it was forbidden to cut it out and use it as a stamp. Thus an addition in value by a hand stamp or a manuscript to a postal stationery envelope is a surcharge. Such markings on regular envelopes are considered as “paid in cash” and are not surcharges, because the envelope is not a government security.**

**Provisional surcharges can also occur on postage stamps, but these are very rare. A surcharge usually adds to the value, but can decrease the value if necessary. Provisional Surcharges were always made by the postmaster or a post office clerk.**

**The definition of a postal provisional is an envelope or stamp that is of immediate need, is used temporarily, and will later be replaced on a permanent basis. Provisional Surcharges were created upon demand and used immediately in post offices. These should not be confused with Postmasters’ Provisional Surcharges.**

**A Provisional Surcharge becomes a Postmasters’ Provisional issue ONLY when it is created for present sale at the post office of origin, but is intended by both the postmaster and the purchaser for future usage.**

# 5¢ INDIAN RED STAMP SURCHARGED AT DON PEDRO'S BAR, TUOLUMNE COUNTY



**No 3¢ stamps available. Indian Red 5¢ stamp surcharged 3¢ by postmaster Richard Smith, April 23, 1859, to pay under 3,000 mile rate. Indian Red shade used in California mid-1858 through fall of 1859, determines year.**

**5¢ stamps overpaying under 3,000 mile rate from Don Pedro's Bar known starting July 22, 1858. No reason to surcharge a 5¢ stamp on cover deposited at the post office.**

**Selling stamps for later use would necessitate surcharging 3¢ to prevent a purchaser from using as 5¢ later on. This qualifies the stamp as a Postmaster's Provisional stamp issue.**



**Don Pedro's Bar, February 29, 1860. 3¢ stamp current 1857-1861.  
The February 29 leap year date proves 1860 usage.**

**Proof that this post office later had stamps in denomination of the surcharge is necessary to validate Postmaster's Provisional status.**

# GENESIS OF A CALIFORNIA PROVISIONAL SURCHARGE

## QUARTZBURG, MARIPOSA COUNTY



**The new 10¢ trans-continental rate became effective April 1, 1855, but due to sending this information by steamship to San Francisco and then by stage or horseback to the outlying towns, California postmasters were not aware of this rate until the latter part of April.**

**Posted April 11, 1855 after the 10¢ rate became effective but prior to such notification being received at Quartzburg. The Clinton, N.Y., receiving post office did not accept the old 6¢ rate, applying the manuscript "4c Due" to make up the 10¢ rate.**

# GENESIS OF A CALIFORNIA PROVISIONAL SURCHARGE

## QUARTZBURG, MARIPOSA COUNTY



**June 26, 1855.**  
Postmaster David M. Pool applied town hand stamp and manuscript "Paid 10".



**July 28, 1855.** Year date included. Hand stamped "Paid" were against the postal regulations, but were accepted.

# QUARTZBURG PROVISIONAL SURCHARGE



**7¢ Provisional Surcharge on 3¢ postal stationery, to make the 10¢ rate, February 1, 1856, by Postmaster David M. Pool. Noting the requirement to use stamps after January 1, 1856, the postmaster began using the old postal stationery.**

## NEW 10¢ NESBITT ENVELOPE USED AT QUARTZBURG



**The new 10¢ envelope, cancelled June 2, 1856. Evidence that the post office later used the new postal stationery or current stamps is necessary to prove prior temporary necessity of surcharging, thus validating the Provisional Surcharge status.**

# **PROVISIONAL SURCHARGE AMOUNTS**

**The surcharge amounts presently known  
are 1¢, 6¢, 7¢, 10¢, and 14¢.**

**MARYSVILLE, YUBA COUNTY  
4 CENTS PAID, SINGLE RATE**



**4¢ Provisional Surcharge to make 10¢ rate.  
By postmaster Philip W. Keyser, May 31, 1855**

**MARYSVILLE, YUBA COUNTY**  
**14¢ PAID, OVERWEIGHT DOUBLE RATE**



**14¢ Provisional Surcharge to make 20¢ rate.**  
**By postmaster Philip W. Kaiser, April 16, 1855.**

**MARIPOSA, MARIPOSA COUNTY  
1¢ PAID, SINGLE RATE**



**1¢ Provisional Surcharge to make 10¢ rate,  
by postmaster John F. McNamara, June 26, 1855.**

**Lightly cancelled 3¢ stamp removed from  
another envelope and illegally reused.  
Patron brought envelope into post office for a 1¢  
stamp which was not in stock.**

# AUBURN, PLACER COUNTY PROVISIONAL SURCHARGE



**Crayon "7" placed over indicia, PAID 10 Provisional Surcharge by postmaster James Bowen, also known as James Bonnen.**

**Addressee Lucy S. Brooks' son was Julius P. Brooks, agent for the Pacific Express Company, with an office in Auburn. Not carried by the Express. Envelope used as a return address.**

# POSTMASTERS' PROVISIONAL SURCHARGES AUBURN, CALIFORNIA



**7¢ Provisional Surcharges used August 4, 1855, and October 19, 1855. By postmaster James Bowen. Close similarity indicates these were created at the same time. Next page shows two more covers, all being used over eight months, proving they were sold for future use.**

**Different from the Provisional Surcharge cover on the previous page.**

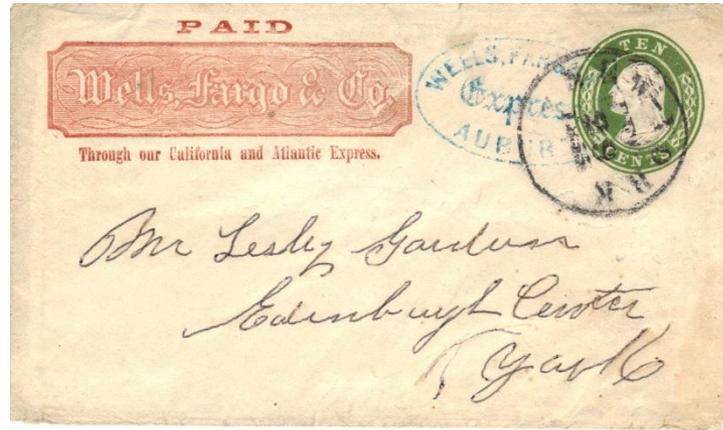
# POSTMASTERS' PROVISIONAL SURCHARGES AUBURN, CALIFORNIA



**These covers very similar to the two on the previous page, issued for future usage. Surcharge was made by postmaster James Bowen, and accepted later on by the succeeding postmaster, E. G. Smith, further proving Postmasters' Provisional Surcharge status.**

**Probably the sender, Julius P. Brooks, had these pre-franked envelopes taken to the post office by an employee.**

# EXPRESS COMPANY USAGE OF NEW 10¢ ENVELOPE



**The Wells Fargo Express Company office in Auburn had the new 10¢ covers well before the local post office obtained them.**

**Wells Fargo Express cancel, November 28 - December 3, 1855. Carried in a closed mail sack departing San Francisco, December 5, on the "Golden Age". Arrived at New York, on the "*Philadelphia*", December 29, taken to the post office and cancelled same day.**

# WHITING & CO'S FEATHER RIVER EXPRESS COMPANY



**Bidwell's Bar, Butte County, January 2, 1858.  
7¢ Provisional Surcharge by postmaster John W. Gilkyson.**

**Whiting & Co's Feather River Express carried mail by dog sled in the winter from Bidwell's Bar to Marysville. There transferred to stage coach for Sacramento and then river steamer to San Francisco. Reverse docketing April 12, 1858. Weather conditions resulted in 101 day's transit from California to Massachusetts.**

# SPARGUR'S HONEY LAKE EXPRESS



**Quincy, Plumas County, May 17, 1860, State of Nataqua.  
7¢ Provisional Surcharge.**

**Spargur's Honey Lake Express was a small express connecting gold mining camps in the Honey Lake area with Quincy.**

**Dissatisfied settlers in the Honey Lake area seceded from California and formed their own State of Nataqua on April 26, 1856. While not recognized by the United States or California, Nataqua was complete with all governmental functions and services, lasting until February 15, 1863.**

TRANSCONTINENTAL POSTAL RATE CHANGE  
CALIFORNIA PROVISIONAL SURCHARGES, 1855-59



**The 28 Northern California towns known to use one or more Provisional Surcharges.**

MAP OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA TOWNS USING PROVISIONAL SURCHARGES

All transcontinental mail went through San Francisco (did not use Provisional Surcharges). Mail from northern towns went by stagecoach or express rider to Sacramento, then by river steamer with a stop at Benecia on San Pablo Bay to San Francisco. Towns south of San Francisco sent mail by stagecoach or express rider to that transit city.

Express companies and steamers arranged schedules to meet ocean ship departures from San Francisco, explaining general bunching of cancellation dates from certain towns.