

## A Langton's Pioneer Express Cover

By Patrick Crosby

After being declared prohibited in 1845 by the USPOD (United States Post Office Department) private express companies were allowed in 1852, but with an assurance that the USPOD would get their letter postage revenue. This was accomplished by requiring all private mail carriers to use government stamped envelopes for all correspondence paying the correct postage rate. In the event no suitable stamped envelopes were available, postage stamps could be substituted. In addition, private express fees were also charged, sometimes noted with a private frank (a mark indicating postal charges were paid, also a verb), which could be a handstamp, an imprint, or a local stamp of an express company. If an express company picked up and delivered an item with no post office services needed, they still had to pay USPOD postage. All along, exceptions were made for remote areas not near any post offices.

In the mining areas of California and Nevada Territory the need for miners and businesses to communicate with the outside world was met by private express companies. Samuel W. Langton established his Langton's Express in February 1850, operating into 1865 under various combinations of owners and 7 different names, all starting with "Langton's". No covers from Langton are known until 1852 since he had not been using a frank or other company handstamp. With some mining camps having only a brief life, a Langton's express served at least 173 camps and towns between Marysville, Nevada City, and Downieville, CA and Virginia City, N.T. (Nevada Territory).



From the Grass Valley Telegraph March 18, 1856



By the time the featured cover was posted the company was known as "Langton's Pioneer Express" and his imprinted frank includes "PAID" meaning the express fees. Over the years Langton used different franks, the one on this cover being referred to as the "football" frank which has 2 subtypes and is seen in 4 colors. Black is the most common with over 100 covers known. [This cover's frank is Haller FL3, ty. 4]

The featured 10¢ government stamped envelope is the highest value of the first set of U.S. envelopes. It paid the domestic letter postage rate for over 3,000 miles, this cover being sent to Poughkeepsie, NY. The envelope is Scott U18a and United Postal Stationery Society number 28a, the "a" referring to yellow green instead of green - both colors valued used at \$180. Langton's Pioneer Express carried the cover from some

unknown mine to Downieville, CA (post office: 1852 to present), where it entered the U.S. mails on June 3<sup>rd</sup>. The year? The envelope issue year was 1853 and the next 10¢ envelope issue was in 1860. Also, the variation “Langton’s Pioneer Express” was used from 2-23-1855 until 8-24-1864. So, the year is likely anywhere from 1855 to 1861. There are no markings on the cover’s reverse.

Samuel Langton died on August 24, 1864, succumbing to his injuries after his buggy had encountered a logging wagon in Silver City, N.T. Two of his brothers and his wife, Anne, took over the company, then sold out to a Downieville banker on 11-21-1865. Smart move since the buyer was squeezed out of business by Wells, Fargo & Co. only 10 months later.

#### References:

- Prior, Scott W., *Expressing with Samuel W. Langton 1852-1865*, <http://www.rfrajola.com> [This is a philatelic exhibit providing much more and complete information on Langton’s expresses than other sources.]
- *Laws Relating to the Service of the Post Office Department* (Washington DC, 1852), [see [www.uspostalbulletins.com](http://www.uspostalbulletins.com)]
- Perlman, Michael, *Western Express Usages of Ten Cent Stamps and Entireties*, [www.westerncoversociety.org](http://www.westerncoversociety.org)
- *A Terrible Accident* (Gold Hill Daily News, Gold Hill, N.T.) 13 August 1864 (see [www.chronicalingamericalocal.gov](http://www.chronicalingamericalocal.gov))
- Dan Undersander, editor, *Catalog of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Stamped Envelopes and Wrappers of the United States* (Chester, VA: United Postal Stationery Society 2016)
- *Scott 2019 Specialized Catalog of United States Stamps and Covers*, (Sidney, OH: Amos Media, 2018) [Langton’s only local stamp is listed under Local Stamps, Humboldt Express]

**Patrick Crosby** is a member of the Nevada Stamp Study Society and collects U.S. postal stationery, stamps, and post-cards with an emphasis on postal history.

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