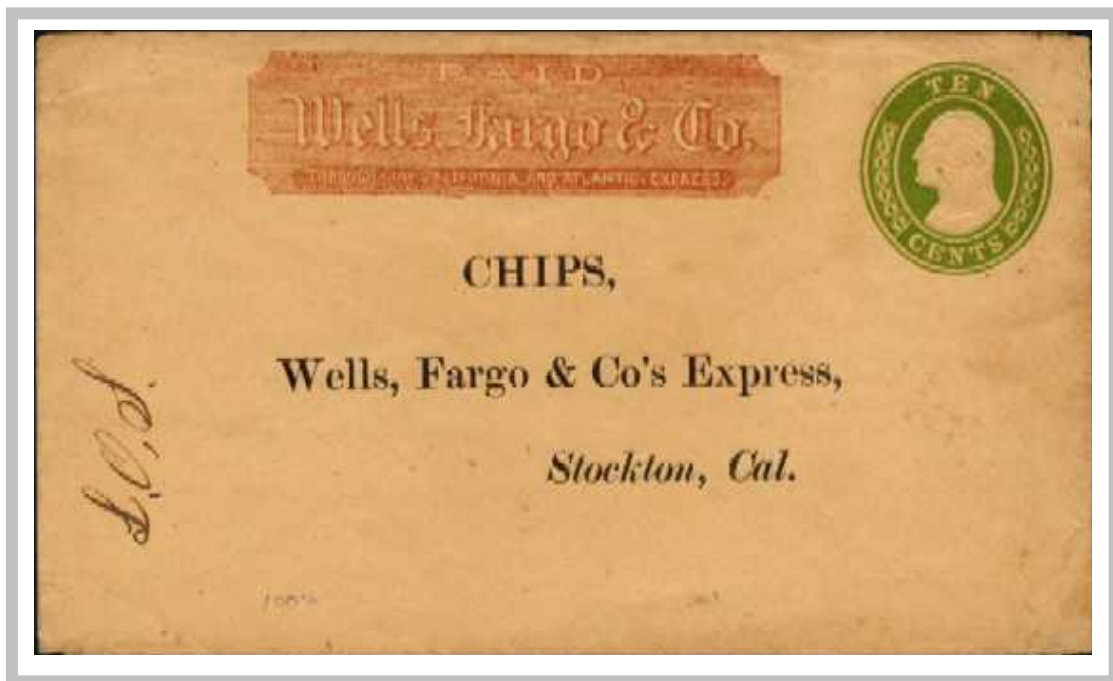


The Chips Covers – The Postal History Legacy of a Wells Fargo Agent



Pilsbury Hodgkins, like many of his time, was infected with Gold Fever. In 1849, he hired on to the sailing ship *York* bound for California as a ship's carpenter, earning himself the nickname "Chips." From San Francisco, he proceeded to Stockton and the Southern Mines of Tuolumne County. In addition to mining for gold, Hodgkins also worked part time as a mounted messenger for several express companies prior to becoming a longtime Wells Fargo employee. Among his other duties, he served as a Wells, Fargo & Co. messenger on the route between Stockton and San Francisco from 1857 until 1869. Chips died in 1892, and according to his obituary, his last words were "The Express has gone wrong."



March, 1858. Printed Frank in Red. 10¢ postal stationary envelope with red printed "PAID / Wells, Fargo & Co. / THROUGH OUR CALIFORNIA AND ATLANTIC EXPRESS." frank. Manuscript "L.O.S.", the initials of Chips' future wife, on face. Docketed on reverse "Received March 21st at Stockton 1858."

The Chips Covers Reynolds & Co's Express



Reynolds & Co.'s Express. (March 1851). Red "Boston MA / MAR 22" circular datestamp with "40" (cents) rate marking for transcontinental carriage in effect from July 1, 1847 through June 30, 1851. Reynolds handstamp indicating express company carriage to Stockton and the Southern Mines.

Reynolds & Co.'s Express operated from early 1850 to the fall of 1851. Reynolds would pick up mail at the San Francisco post office for designated recipients in the Stockton area.

40



"During that winter [1850] it was almost impossible to get letters from loved ones at home - as there were no stages and no post offices. A man by the name of Brown started for Stockton and San Francisco with every miner's name for several miles about there, and returned in about two weeks with many letters, for all, of which he charged the modest sum of five dollars each. All were very willing to pay that price and many who did not get letters would gladly have paid more than that for one."

From the *Autobiography and Reminiscence of Pilsbury Hodgkins*, The Society of California Pioneers, Alice Phelan Sullivan Library. San Francisco, California

The Chips Covers Reynolds & Co's Express



Reynolds & Co.'s Express. (April 1851). Manuscript “West Townsend / Mass Apr 22” with “40” (cents) rate for transcontinental carriage.

Reynolds handstamp with manuscript “2” (dollars) for express charge for carriage to Stockton and the Southern Mines.



One of fewer than five recorded examples of this handstamp.

The Chips Covers
 Adams & Co.'s Express
 Brown's Express



Forwarded by Browns Express. (June 1852). Blue double-line oval handstamp and “50^{Cts}” rate handstamp used in conjunction with “Adams & Co's Express, San Francisco.” Carried by Adams to Stockton where it was turned over to Brown's for delivery at the Southern Mines. Manuscript “2” at upper right indicating \$2.00 charge for Adams carriage from San Francisco to Stockton and Brown's 50¢ handstamp for service from Stockton to the mines.

William A. Brown started an express between Stockton and the Southern Mines in 1850. Brown was murdered in April 1853 but the express continued under his name until Feb. 1855 when Adams & Co. collapsed.



50^{Cts}



“March 1, 1851, Mr. Brown, an agent for Reynolds's Express came for me to carry the Express through the mining camps. He had been in business about a year...

“On nearing a mining camp the miners would give a yell ‘here comes Chips’. By the time I would reach the store of the Express Agency, they would be there anxiously waiting for news from home. I carried letters obtained from San Francisco, Sacramento, Stockton, and Marysville, charging two dollars and fifty cents each, and sometimes more.”

From the *Autobiography and Reminiscence of Pilsbury Hodgkins*, The Society of California Pioneers, Alice Phelan Sullivan Library. San Francisco, California

The Chips Covers Transcontinental Mail Rates by US Mail



Salem, MA, via Stockton, to Jackass Gulch, California. Stampless coversheet (separated from letter contents) with red “PAID” and “6” indicating prepayment of the **6¢ transcontinental rate effective July 1, 1851**. Numeral “6” rate markings are unusual, as few postmasters had enough transcontinental mail to justify the purchase of the handstamp.



Boston, MA, via Panama, to Stockton, CA. January 4, 1857. “Boston / 4 / Jan / Mass” date stamp and 1857 docketing on reverse. Addressed to “Mr. P Hodgkins / Better known as ‘Chips’” and endorsed “Care of Wells Fargo + Co.”. The **10¢ transcontinental rate effective April 1, 1855**.

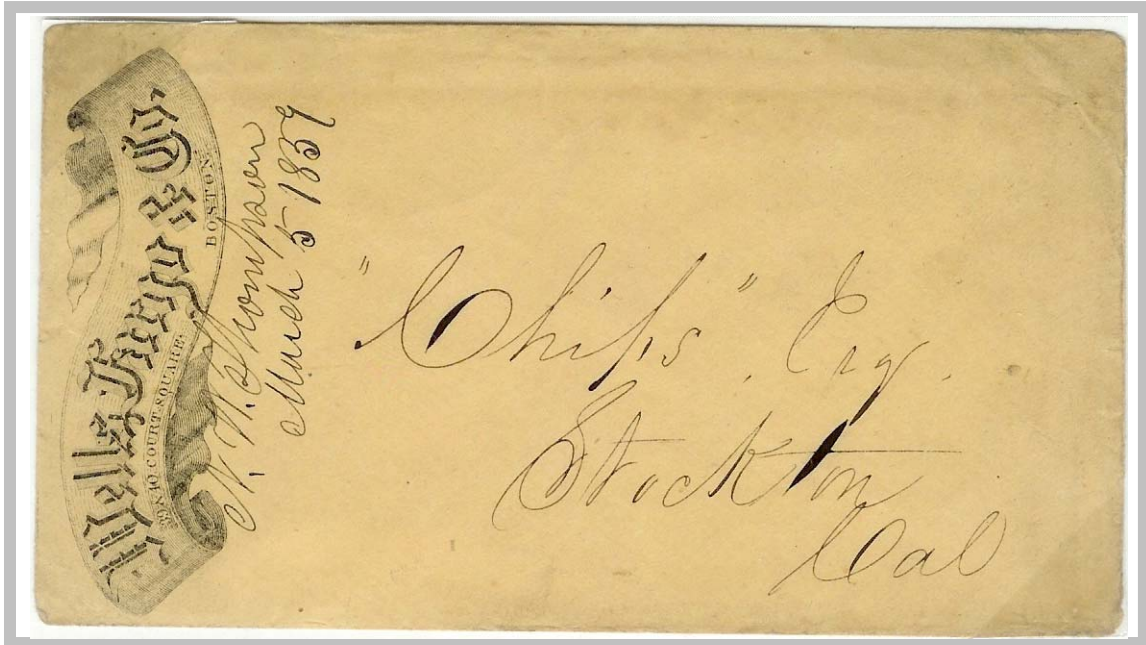
The Chips Covers
Transcontinental Carriage by US Mail
Forwarded by Wells Fargo & Co.



September 3, 1858. Shirley, MA, overland to Stockton, California; forwarded to Martinez, CA. Manuscript "Shirley, Ms., Sept 3" origin postmark, forwarded to Martinez, Cal. by blue "STOCK^N MESSENGER" oval handstamp, endorsed at bottom "Care of Chips of Wells Fargo & Co. Ex." "Oct 1st 1858, Stockton" docketing on reverse.

In 1853, Chips left the mines to work full time for Todd & Company at their Stockton office. Later, Wells Fargo & Co., purchased Todd's and retained Hodgkins as an employee. On his first trip from Stockton to San Francisco on May 15, 1857, Chips was responsible for the transport of \$23,111.50 in gold dust and \$4,717.50 in gold coins. By the end of his first 12 months, he had been entrusted with almost \$4.5 million in gold. He worked the Stockton / San Francisco route faithfully for over a decade and may be the "Stockton Messenger" designated by this handstamp.

The Chips Covers Boston Printed Return



March 5, 1859. Boston, MA, via Panama, to Stockton, California. “Wells, Fargo & Co. / 39 & 40 Court Square / Boston” black ribbon printed vertically at left on cover to Chips at Stockton. No express or postal markings and no US postage paid. Docketed at left as sent March 5, 1859. Docketed on reverse “Received March 30th 1859 S.F.” Wells Fargo did not always pay the US postage on its internal correspondence.

Two covers with this Boston return address design have been recorded. This is the only dated example.



The Chips Covers Boston Correspondence



Boston, via Panama and San Francisco, to Stockton, California. “WELLS, FARGO & Co. EXPRESS / Boston” blue oval handstamp. Carried outside of the mails from company offices in Boston to Stockton, CA. “WELLS, FARGO & Co. EXPRESS / San Francisco” blue oval handstamp applied as transit marking. Endorsed “Free” in manuscript and sent without imprinted frank as there were no Wells, Fargo & Co. charges on internal correspondence. Endorsed “Valuable” on left possibly prompting the addition of the San Francisco transit handstamp.

Fewer than five covers with this Boston handstamp have been recorded.



Boston origin handstamp



San Francisco transit
handstamp

The Chips Covers
 Eastbound - Entering the Mails in New York and Boston



December 1858. Carried by Wells Fargo to New York where it entered the mails on December 29, 1858. Datestamp with inverted month slug. Endorsed “Chips” on face. Red frank indicates payment of transcontinental express fees.

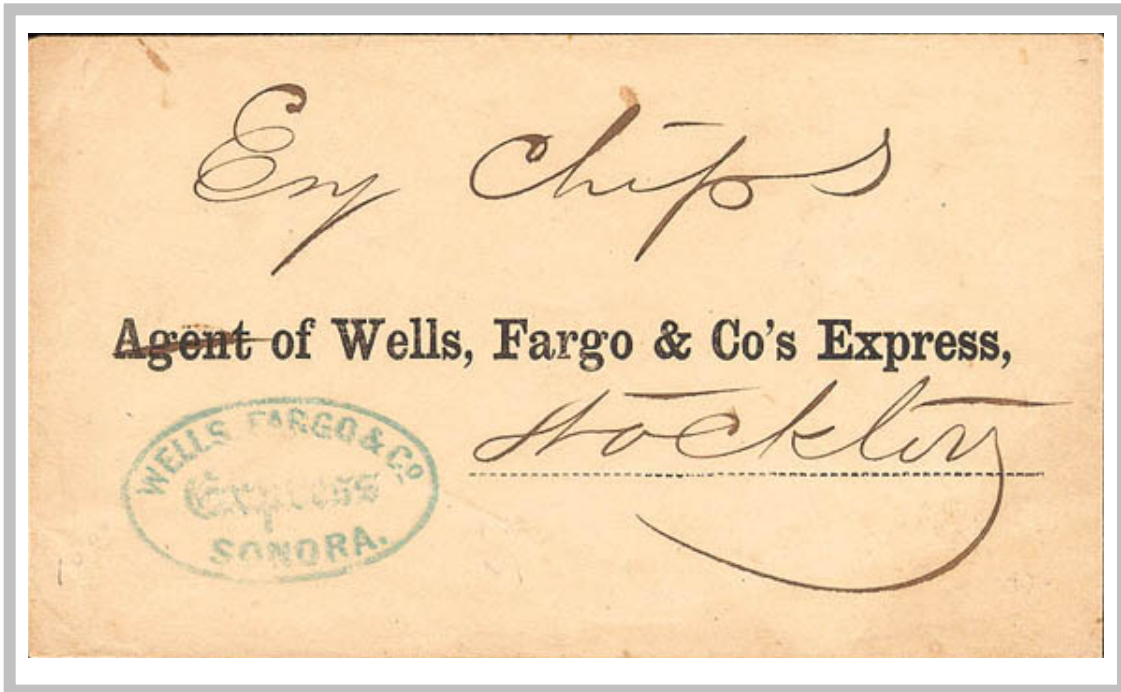


March 3, 1860. Carried by Wells Fargo to Boston where it entered the mails on March 26, 1860. Boston circular “PAID” cancellation. Endorsed “Chips” on face and with manuscript “3\$” and “3Dollars” on backflap. Addressee was the mother of Chips’ wife.



Stockton date stamp in blue on reverse

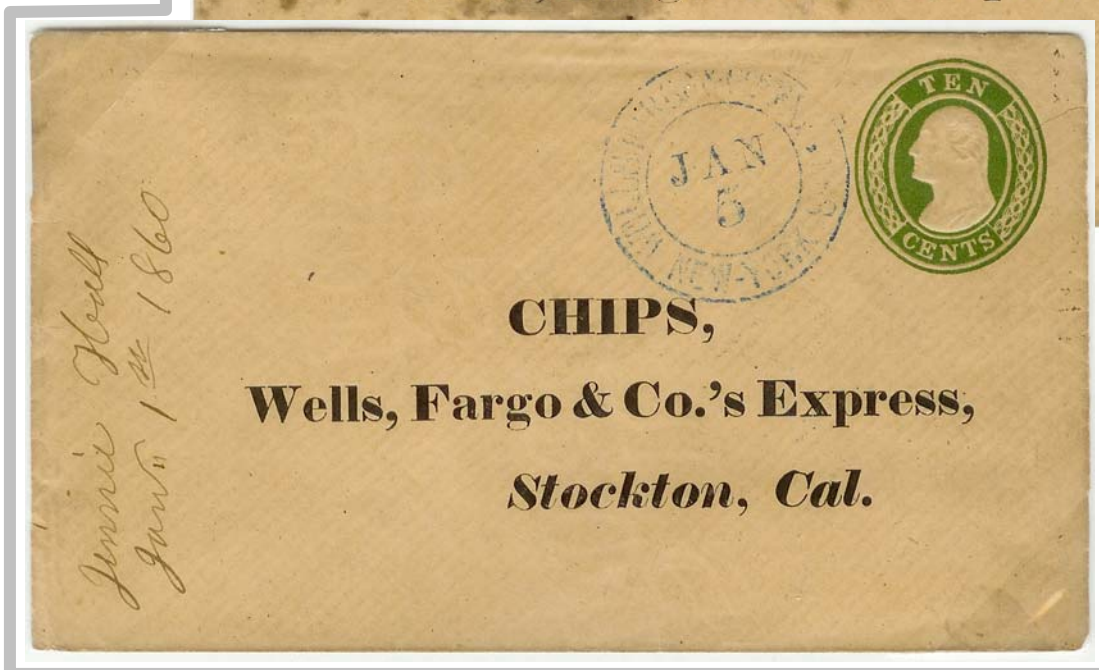
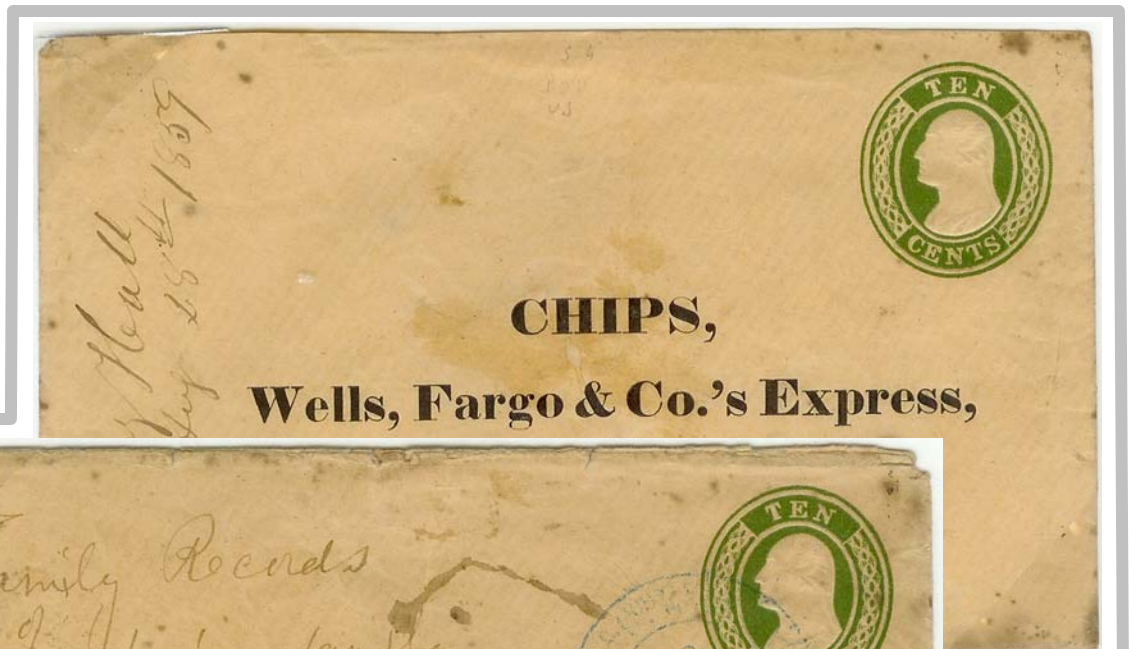
The Chips Covers
“Agent of Wells, Fargo & Co’s Express”



Sonora, California to Stockton, California. Preaddressed envelope endorsed to Wells, Fargo office in Stockton. Generic “Agent” designation crossed out and Chips designated as addressee. No postage or printed frank, as likely contained internal Wells, Fargo company correspondence.

Sonora was located about 60 miles east of Stockton in the gold country at the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains.

The Chips Covers
Personal Correspondence

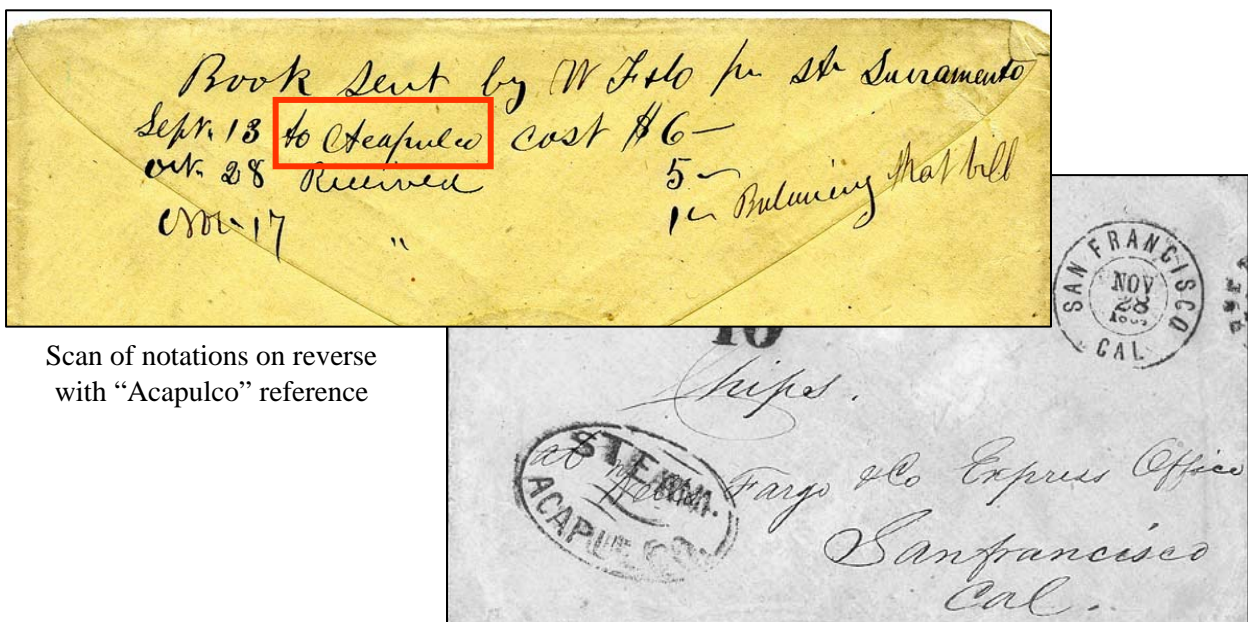


Manuscript notations on this and other covers indicates that Wells Fargo carried Chips' personal correspondence free of express charges. Chips likely made these preaddressed envelopes available to his family and friends, in addition to their likely having been used for internal correspondence. Docketing notations are in Chips' handwriting and include this one about "Family Records;" some that read "L.O.S.," referring to Louisa O. Shattuck, Chips' future bride; and others with various names in the Shattuck family.

The Chips Covers Mexican Origination



Originated in Mexico and likely carried by the Wells Fargo messenger aboard the Pacific steamer to San Francisco. Cancelled at the San Francisco office of Wells Fargo. Notations on the reverse indicate that Chips sent a book by Wells Fargo to Acapulco six days after the receipt of this letter on the Steamer *Sacramento* at a cost of \$6.00, likely in response to the letter that would have been enclosed. He noted receipt of \$5.00 and \$1.00 over the following two months. Additionally, the handwriting matches that on another cover addressed to Chips that also has a “Steam Acapulco” handstamp, indicating that it arrived on a steamer from that port and that the sender was likely in Mexico.



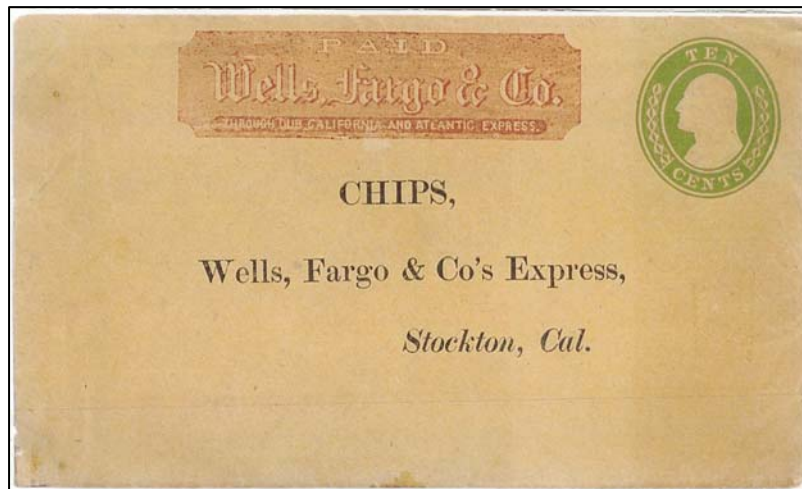
Scan of notations on reverse with “Acapulco” reference

Matching handwriting of sender on a different cover from Acapulco

The Chips Covers Orange Express Label – Gilroy, CA



Red Printed Frank with small “Paid.” 10¢ postal stationary envelope with red printed “PAID / Wells, Fargo & Co. / THROUGH OUR CALIFORNIA AND ATLANTIC EXPRESS.” frank. Reverse with Orange “Wells, Fargo & Co’s / EXPRESS / From” label with Gilroy, CA postmark. Such labels often were applied to envelopes carrying money or other valuables.



Photocopy of Front (75% scale)

The Chips Covers California and West Coast Mail



March 16, 1858. San Juan, CA, to Stockton, CA. Carried at the 3¢ rate by US Mail. By this time, Chips was so well known in the Stockton area that mail addressed solely to “Chips, Stockton, Cal.” would be directed to him whether by Wells Fargo or the US Mail.

San Juan, California, about 40 miles south of San Jose, is listed in one database as being in operation from 1851 – 1905, at which time it became known as San Juan Bautista, after the Mission located there. Alternatively, a post office in North San Juan, California, about 75 miles north east of Sacramento, was established in 1857.

The Chips Covers California and West Coast Mail



Martinez, California. Black Wells, Fargo frank on 3¢ postal stationery. Blue “WELLS, FARGO & Co. / Express / MARTINEZ” oval stamp. Addressed to Louisa O. Hodgkins, with manuscript endorsement “{Care of Chips}”. Both US postage and Wells, Fargo fees paid on this intra-California letter.

Chips courted Louisa Shattuck across the country and they were married in 1858. Letters were easily sent to her using Wells, Fargo & Co. and her well known husband. Martinez is located in Contra Costa county across the bay and northeast of San Francisco, In about 1860, Chips purchased and drained about 1000 acres land in the nearby Sacramento River delta which he used to graze cattle and supplement his Wells Fargo wages. Due to a subsequent spelling error that became institutionalized, this island is today named “Chippis Island.”

The Chips Covers

Washington Territory and West Coast Mail



Wallula, Washington Territory to Stockton, CA. 3¢ postal stationary envelope with black printed “PAID / Wells, Fargo & Co. / OVER OUR CALIFORNIA AND COAST ROUTES.” frank. Black straight line “Wallula, WT” handstamp that is unrecorded in Leutinger. Wallula, WT was listed as a Wells, Fargo office as of 1864.



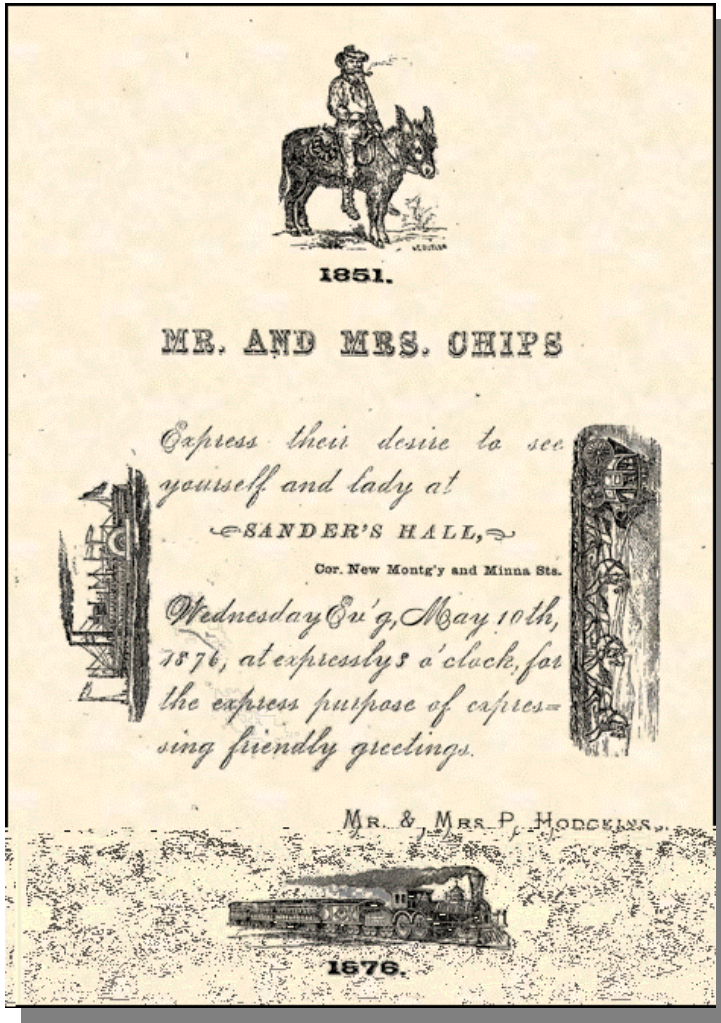
WALLULA WT

Illustration of handstamp

Previously unrecorded and only know example

The handwriting on this cover matches that on other correspondence from J.M. VanSyckle. VanSyckle was the Wells Fargo agent in Portland, Oregon Territory until July 1859. He moved to Wallula and became agent for the Oregon Steam Navigation Company steamboat line on the Columbia River and also agent for Tracy's Express. Tracy sold his express to Wells Fargo in 1862 or 1863. VanSyckle probably became the Wells Fargo agent in Wallula as a result and probably ordered or made the straight-line device above. He would have known Chips from his previous tenure as the Portland Wells Fargo agent.

Chips' Twenty-Fifth Anniversary with the Express 1851-1876



Mr. And Mrs. Chips
Express their desire to see
yourself and lady at
~Sanders Hall~
Cor New Montg'y and Minna Sts.
Wednesday Ev'g, May 10th,
1876, at expressly 8 o'clock, for
the express purpose of expres-
sing friendly greetings
Mr. & Mrs. P. Hodgkins

Reproduction from a photograph of an original invitation to the reception honoring Chips' 25th anniversary as an Expressman.

“In May 1876 at the suggestion of Uncle Henry Wells, I gave an Express Reception having had twenty-five years of continual service in the Express business. About five hundred attended the reception. An address was made by Henry Wells who gave some of his early reminiscences in New York, when he carried the Express matter in a valise. He paid a high complement to the California Expressmen as a body.”

The company presented Chips “in behalf of the employees of Wells, Fargo & Co. - your comrades and co-laborers in the Express business - this casket of silver-ware, consisting of knives, forks and spoons, and to ask your acceptance of the same as a substantial token of our personal esteem and friendship.”

From the *Autobiography and Reminiscence of Pilsbury Hodgkins*, The Society of California Pioneers, Alice Phelan Sullivan Library. San Francisco, California