

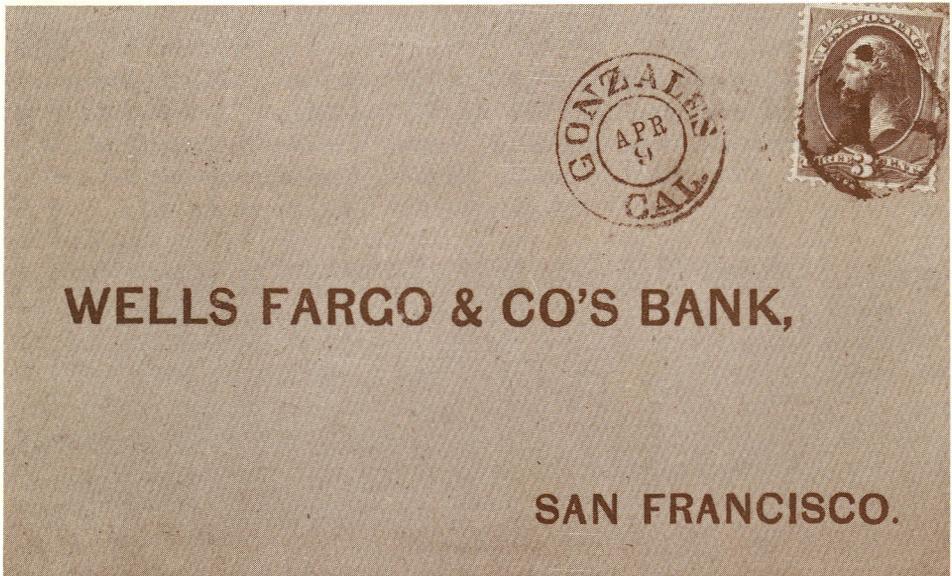
NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

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The Early Mails in Monterey County



Gonzales was a busy place when this letter was mailed in 1883. The color of the cancel is magenta.

Throughout the development of the western frontier during the last century the railroads played a vital role in the opening of new territories. The economic and social importance of the Iron Horse has never been underestimated by students of the old west. Wherever it went the character of the land around it changed and as the rails expanded throughout California a land rush occurred the likes of which have yet to be matched. What ever direction the rails pointed became prime land and men rushed ahead founding

settlements in the hopes of convincing the railroad to stop at their town. The power of granting right-of-way was a valuable asset indeed!

The train brought the means of getting goods to market and provided a reliable line of communications. It is no wonder then that during the 1880's, when the railroads were expanding through California in every direction, more post offices were established in Monterey County than in any other decade in its history. Of the eighty-nine offices that have existed in this county since its formation in 1850 twenty-eight were established between 1880 and 1890.¹

With this trend in mind we shall now conclude our story of the early mails in Monterey County by taking a look at the development of the Salinas Valley and the important role the railroad played in its history.

In the days before the railroad stimulated settlement in the valley the express companies were the most reliable source of communications for those living south of Salinas. The "Old Stage Road" ran south from San Juan through Natividad, Soledad, **Los Coches**, San Antonio and San Miguel on its way to San Luis Obispo. SAN ANTONIO, the earliest of the south county post offices, opened on December 16th, 1858. It was an important station until the railroad reached King City and it was closed on September 28th, 1887.² The stage route ran through the San Antonio Valley past **Rancho Pleito** and left Monterey County just before it reached San Miguel. The post office at PLEYTO opened and closed a number of times between December 14th, 1870 and February 14th, 1925. Originally established as Pleito, the name was amended to PLEYTO on December 8th, 1884. The site of the little town of Pleyto is now gone forever — covered by the lake created by the Nacimiento Dam.

A few years after Pleyto was established, the P.O. at JOLON opened for business on January 18th, 1872. Located about half way between San Antonio and Pleyto, JOLON was an ideal site for a stage station. It immediately became important because of its proximity to the nearly inaccessible coast areas between Big Sur and San Simeon.³ The original site of the once thriving settlement is marked by a decayed adobe structure that once housed the Dutton Hotel as well as the P.O. JOLON is still in operation and is located about a half mile south of the original site.

Throughout the 60s, 70s and 80s traffic over the stage lines was extensive for, besides the ships that ploughed up and down the coast, it was the only means of transportation between north and south. The settlements remained small however, and when the locomotive finally thundered down the valley

¹ If we include all offices opened between 1869, the year the S. P. reached Soledad, and 1900 the number grows to 64 out of 89. The number 89, incidentally, is an arbitrary one selected by the author as the maximum possible. Some offices are in question.

² San Antonio township is located about 5 miles out of King City on the Jolon Road. A few old houses remain in the area.

³ See NOTICIAS Vol. XII, Number 4. December 1968. pp. 59-60.

from Soledad the engine bell not only rang in the new towns — it also rang out the old.

The 1870s also brought some settlement on the far east side of lower Monterey County. In the San Lorenzo Canyon north of the intersection of highways 198 and 25 lies the beautiful Peach Tree Valley. In the late 60s a few settlers were attracted to the area because of the beauty and climate. On January 20th, 1873 the PEACH TREE P.O. began serving local residents with regular mail deliveries but because the population never grew much it became uneconomical to operate the facility, so it was closed on June 15th, 1909. The story is much the same with SLACK CANYON and IMUSDALE. Located about thirty-five miles to the south in the same general area SLACK CANYON was established on February 10th, 1873 and IMUSDALE on September 22, 1875. Located about five miles north of the yet to be established town of Parkfield, Imusdale is one of those funny little places that would be totally forgotten were it not for the post office. A cemetery is about all that remains. IMUSDALE closed on August 15th, 1902 and SLACK CANYON followed shortly thereafter on October 31st, 1902. The area known as Slack Canyon still hums with activity for it is used by the California Penal System!

Just before the era of the railroad the Post Office Department added four more post offices to its growing service lines in this area. PRIEST VALLEY was established in San Benito County on December 14th, 1882 and transferred, because of a site change, to Monterey County on October 23rd, 1883. It closed



Pleyto in 1906 was a quiet little place. The death of the stage line had eliminated any importance it once had.

on March 31st, 1934. GRISWOLD, named for its first postmaster, was established in the area known as Long Valley on June 12th, 1884. Just south of Imusdale a post office was established at the new town of PARKFIELD on January 29th, 1884. It closed February 28th, 1954. Northwest of Peach Tree an office was opened at LONOAK on November 23rd, 1885. It was later transferred into San Benito County on November 17th, 1922 and remained there until it closed. Except for JOLON, PRIEST VALLEY, and PARKFIELD all these postmarks are difficult to find.

The establishment of permanent large scale lines of communication in the Salinas Valley came as a direct result of the Southern Pacific line that was built to connect San Francisco with Los Angeles. There was much excitement in the county during the late 60's and early 70's. The railroad had extended it's lines south from Gilroy in two directions. One spur went to the new town of Hollister and the other ended at Soledad. This, coupled with other factors, prompted the moving of the county seat from Monterey to Salinas. A few year later, on February 12th 1874, the new county of San Benito was created with Hollister as the county seat. The excitement did not end there. It was only a matter of time before the rails would move south again. The land grab was on and the Salinas Valley was about to begin an economic expansion that would make it one of the nation's most productive agricultural regions.

The SOLEDAD post office was established on March 17th, 1869. Being the southern most town on the line it soon became an important stage connection. Within a few years the towns of Chualar and Gonzales sprang up between it and Salinas. CHUALAR was established on April 5th, 1871 and GONZALES opened on December 1st, 1873. After the rails hit Soledad considerable interest was shown in the hot springs that lay in the hills to the south west of town. PARAISO SPRINGS, as it was to be called, became a favorite resort area for travelers so a post office opened there on January 16th, 1877. By 1900 it was a fashionable place to go and many a postcard can be found from the period 1900-1920 showing the cabins and trees and expounding the virtues of the mineral baths. The office closed January 14th, 1939 probably because the seasonal nature of the resort made it impractical to maintain.

By the time the extension of the railroad south from Soledad had begun, the lower Salinas was ready and waiting. Smart men did as David Jacks had done earlier to the north, they bought as much land as they could in the fertile valley where the rails and ties would rumble and creak to the pounding locomotive. They planned towns through which the rails could go. And they looked at the land as a new source of prosperity and wealth. All the while the Post Office Department was kept busy approving post offices for a dozen or more new settlements.

The first settlement south of Soledad is METZ. Primarily a sideline it didn't ever qualify as a town. The P.O. was established March 12th, 1888 and discontinued July 5th, 1933. Twelve miles to the south is KING CITY where



Parkfield had just begun when this letter was posted February 4th, 1888. Notice the horizontal lens used to "kill" the stamp. The ink is blue and the envelope is lemon colored.

the P.O. was opened February 18th, 1887. A growing town. Next comes SAN LUCAS where a P.O. was established January 4th, 1887. Griswold had decided to move his post office down to the rail line and change the name to that of the new planned town. So the day SAN LUCAS opened GRISWOLD ceased to exist in the postal register. Once larger than its southern neighbor San Ardo, the place has dwindled to one store and the P.O. SAN ARDO was originally established as SAN BERNARDO on November 13th, 1886 but was changed May 13th, 1887. Once agricultural, it is now an oil town. And just before the county line comes BRADLEY, named after Bradley V. Sargent, the California State Senator and the owner of the **Rancho San Carlos**. The post office was opened on December 16th, 1886.

The railroad stimulated new development in the surrounding areas as well. To the west in the San Antonio Valley five new post offices were opened—four of them directly the railroad went through the Salinas Valley. BRYSON operated from November 9th, 1887 to November 15th 1937. Established December 3rd, 1887 NASIMENTO was changed to VERATINA on November 7th, 1888 and finally closed July 11th, 1895. South of Jolon LOCKWOOD was opened July 23rd, 1888. The original town is nearly gone and the P.O. is now on the highway. In the Hames Valley down the road from Lockwood and Pleyto HAMES was established July 13th, 1889. The office closed January 31st, 1914. Last of all in this area there was the GEM P.O. Located on top of

the ridge between Pleyto and Bryson, it operated from August 3rd, 1894 to August 31st, 1899. These covers are real GEMs to be sure!

East of Bradley, on the road to Parkfield, Imusdale and Slack Canyon, an office called VALLETON was established February 7th, 1887. When the office closed on June 15th, 1918 the records show the mail being sent out from San Miguel. In the same general area APRICOT operated between July 20th, 1887 and May 31st, 1900. There was no town. It was just a rural P.O. Then there was CRUESSVILLE which opened April 13th, 1888 and closed July 10th, 1891. It was near Valleton. Finally, close to Slack Canyon, STONE CANNON operated from November 28th, 1900 to April 30th, 1932. Many of these postmarks are difficult to find. How much mail could have gone out of NASIMENTO or SAN BERNARDO before the names were changed?

The mail service was now nearly complete in southern Monterey County. A few odds and ends should complete our coverage of the whole county as well. ROMIE, near Soledad, opened April 7th, 1898 and closed March 31st, 1900. SPRECKELS was established on June 22, 1898 and to the south of it AGENDA operated from November 11th, 1896 to September 30th, 1907. GREENFIELD, originally known as Clark Colony, was opened June 30th, 1905. And CAMP McCALLUM, outside Salinas, operated between January 4th, 1943 and September 30th, 1960. This one's a far cry from the early mails...

The development of the early mail system in the county proved to be an interesting subject. The records give a good account of the different areas as they were settled and the pattern of inland expansion. Collecting the covers proved to be only half the fun. In the next number we shall try to squeeze in a bibliography and add a few things that were absentmindedly omitted by the author!

Rick Wilkerson

COME ONE! COME ALL! WALK WITH US THROUGH HISTORY!

This year our annual adobe tour to be held April 26th will be something different indeed! Maggie Downer, Chairman, has planned historical vignettes to be performed by local actors at the various adobes. Franciscan friars will be teaching neophyte Indians at the Royal Presidio Chapel, miners will be panning for gold at the Brick House, from the balcony of the Whaling Station a look-out will run up flags to direct the whaling boats, "Dance Hall Girls" will be your hostesses at the First Theatre, at Casa Amesti there will be a festive ball scene—to mention only a few. Several of the public owned buildings have been deliberately chosen for the tour this year so that our members and guests will be encouraged to see the new exhibits, to refresh their memories of the history of Monterey, and to plan on taking future friends and visitors around the Path of History during the Bi-centennial years.

After you have completed the walking tour—be sure to visit the Casa

Estrada for tea, and remember that lunch will be served al fresco in the Memory Garden of the Pacific Building from 11:30 to 2.

Interest in the tour will be heightened by the presentation of "Adobe Fashions, old and new" at Del Monte Center April 18th at 7 p.m. and April 19th at 1 p.m. Near the fountain on the mall a little bit of romance and music will set the scene for a fashion show presented by our association and the Del Monte Center merchants. There will be seats available at \$1.00 each on a first come basis. Mrs. Kenneth H. Gardner, our able chairman, also reports that the merchants of the center will decorate their windows to coordinate the exhibits with the adobe theme of "A Walk Through History."

Each year your association reaches out to the general public to encourage an interest in California history. A tree grows only as it senses its roots in the good earth. Next month we will report on the history essay contest now in progress for the children of our local schools. This also is part of this 1969 adobe tour.

COSAS DE INTERES PARA LOS SOCIOS

MARK YOUR CALENDARS! For 1969-Adobe Tour April 26th, Merienda June 7th, Sloat Landing July 4th. For 1970-Adobe Tour April 25th, Merienda June 6th, Sloat Landing July 3rd. Also, in 1970, our association will be host to the California Historical Society June 18th to June 20th.

MEMBERSHIP: At the March Board Meeting, R. Littlefield reported there are 1140 active members, 111 sustaining members, 56 junior members, and 62 life memberships.

NEW MEMBERS SINCE DECEMBER 1969: Mr. and Mrs. Bruce MacKenzie, Mr. and Mrs. John Duffin, Mrs. Mona Hageman, Mrs. E. J. Dwyer, Mr. Fred Farr, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Shirley, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur William Barter, ADM. and Mrs. George R. Luker, Mr. and Mrs. F. Gordon Campbell, Mr. and Mrs. Robert McMahan, Miss Michele Urnes, Miss Jennifer Urnes (Junior member), Mr. and Mrs. Haymo Taeuber, Mr. and Mrs. Lou Rudolph, Mr. and Mrs. Potter A. Palmer, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. T. J. King, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson Smith, Mr. C. A. Piper, Dr. and Mrs. Glasco, Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Madden, Miss Engracia Murray, Mr. Larry M. Dick (Junior member), Mrs. Walter E. Vincent, Mrs. Bernice Gibson, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Phelps, Jr., Mr. and Mrs. Michael Elliott, Mr. Earl Ebi, Mr. and Mrs. David Flinn, Mrs. John Gubbon, Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Mahoney, Dr. and Mrs. Robert Slaughter, Mr. and Mrs. Harrington Embree Drake, Mrs. Leslie H. Lippiatt, Mrs. Gilbert M. Tucker, Miss Marjorie Stewart, Mr. and Mrs. Edward J. Schneider III, Mr. Troy S. Niggle, Mr. David L. Ostrander, Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Hanna, Mr. and Mrs. David M. Dysant, Mr. and Mrs. Martin J. A. Peterson, Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Melanson, Mrs. and Mrs. Chalmer C. McWilliams, Mr. and Mrs. Nick Aliotti, Mr. and

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GIFTS: An antique brass fireplace fender from Mrs. S. Hasket Derby of Carmel, and a lace cape from Mr. and Mrs. Loyd V. Armstrong of Carmel. Thank you!