

Viewing the Risvold Americana Collection

by John F. Dunn

We continue this month our review of the January 27-29 Spink Shreves Galleries auction of the Floyd Risvold Collection: "American Expansion & the Journey West."

The next lot in our viewing is this folded letter with a "Fort Leavenworth, Mo. / June 14" date stamp



and matching "X" rate. The datestamp is struck over the only reported example of the "Fort Kearny Oregon Route" manuscript military marking, computer enhanced (inset) to better display the marking. Per the lot description, "The Post Office Department did not establish a Post Office at the fort until 7 July, 1849. This letter was written by a California bound emigrant, J. Emery, who dated it 'On the Plains May 21st 1848'. The following is from the letter: 'I have an opportunity to use the influence of our Captain...to get a letter conveyed...there are so many persons wishing to send letters that it would be impossible for the Quartermaster to get them all in the mail.'...There is a large number of persons going - all rushing ahead - some one way & some another - some of their teams & waggons already giving out & breaking down & the road is strewn with broken waggons - trunks - boxes - bacon - lead - powder - sugar - coffee & in fact everything which people in their mad zeal throw out...some are turning back...There is certain to be a great amount of suffering in the mountains'. There were two Fort Kearnys in what is now the State of Nebraska. The first was abandoned in the spring of 1848, less than a year after it was founded, for a more favorable site at the head of Grand Island in the Platte River." [This is the Ft. Kearny that is seen on Scott 970.]. Estimated at \$4,000-5,000, this cover realized \$6,750.

(All prices reported here do not include the Buyers' Premiums that are added on to these hammer prices. In this auction, the premium was 20% of the successful bid price of each lot up to and including \$2,000 plus 15% of the excess over \$2,000.)

Next we see another important postal history lot, an 1834 folded cover with the earliest known hand-stamped



postmark from California, this also being the only reported example of the "FRANCO ALTA CALIFORNIA" two line straight-line postmark. The cover from Monterey to Senor Don Fernand Deppe at San Diego was docketed internally as originating from "Genl. Jose Figueroa, Monterey 17 Junio 1834". It also

bears the oval "Comandancia General/de la alta California" cachet with spread eagle. Estimated at \$10,000-15,000, it was hammered down for \$27,000.



1857" printed directive on an all over steamship and train illustrated design cover to Panama with a 10¢ green, Type III (Sc. 15) tied by a "San Francisco, Cal./20 Jun" datestamp. It also bears a "DUE 10" handstamp, because the rate (as published in this S. F. News Letter) was 20¢. Per the lot description, "This type of news letter was prepared and printed with current news to date for the sailings of the ships of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company." Estimated at \$10,000-15,000, it sold for \$30,000.

Next up is this Placerville and St. Joseph Overland Telegraph Company red on buff telegraph office illustrated design cover with a



3¢ rose (Sc. 65) tied by a "Placerville, Cal./Jun 30" datestamp. Per the lot description, "Frederick A. Bee established this pioneer telegraph company in 1858. It was the first telegraph line to be strung eastward from California to Nevada and in June of 1861 it was incorporated with other interests as the Pacific Telegraph operating as the Overland Telegraph Company. Building crews, working from both ends, completed the line on October 24th thus bringing to an end the need for the Pony Express, which made its last run in November of 1861. The cover is addressed to A.W. Bee, brother of Frederick Bee." Estimated at \$750-1,000, it fetched \$6,250.

This next lot offers a contemporary report of the death of Mormon leader Joseph Smith. The writer, John L. Cross of Jerseyville, Illinois, writes to his son, John C. Cross, in Somerset County, N.J., on September 6, 1844, "Every thing destroyed, a great many good Houses & Barns...swept of, their crops of every kind gone with all fruit trees, the best of Orchards destroyed, their fences entirely swept of...their stock chiefly drowned.... We had a wonderful time here in June last with the Mormons. There was a printing press sat up in a town three or four miles from Nauvoo, the Mormons City. They printed some pieces against the Mormons that gave offence to some of the leaders of them. Joe Smith their Prophet his Brother with some others

Also in the California section of this fabulous collection, we find this "San Francisco News Letter / P.M.S.S., Golden Age, June 20,



of the leaders went with a mob and pulled down the office, destroyed the press and all that was in the office. Joe, his brother, and two others

was prosecuted, taken and put in prison. Joe sent for the Governor to come and see that he was protected. The Governor went and ordered a guard of fifty men to be kept round the prison till he could have a hearing in Court, but he was not long then till there was a very strong Mob appeared, all in disguise ordered the Guard to make no resistance on the peril of their lives. Mob went to the grates and fired. kill'd Joe, and his Brother..." Estimated at \$1,500-2,000, this historic piece realized \$5,750.

This next cover brings with it a question of the rate. It is a 3¢ red on buff entire (Sc. U2) [darkened here to bring out the markings] uprated



by a pair of the 3¢ dull red (Sc. 11) tied by a blue "Salt Lake City, Utah T./Jan 5" with a manuscript "Via California" (lower left). Per the lot description, it was "carried on the Chorpenning route, probably over the Old Spanish Trail, to California, then by steamer via Panama to Hopewell, N.J....Carried over the Sierras by Snowshoe Thompson for Chorpenning....There is no record of a 9-cent rate 'Via California.' One logical speculation can be based on the fact that the Mormon postmaster at Salt Lake City was in a position to charge whatever he thought appropriate. Thus he may have reasoned that the letter could have gone overland to the east coast for only 3 cents. Therefore if the sender wanted it to go 'Via California,' he should pay the inland rate for under 3,000 miles to California, plus the 6-cent rate for over 3,000 miles from California via Panama, making a total rate of 9 cents. In 1851, Absolom Woodward and George Chorpenning contracted with the Post Office Department to carry the mails from Salt Lake City to San Francisco via the emigrant route through Nevada (then Utah Territory) and over the Sierra Nevada Mountains....Because of the deep snows in the high Sierras, it became too difficult and dangerous...during the winter months. Therefore the route during the winter was changed to the Old Spanish Trail going southwest to Los Angeles and the port of San Pedro." Estimated at \$1,000-1,500, this great lot went for \$7,250.

The colorful display piece at the top of the next column shows a "Pony Express, San Francisco, Sep 11" (1861) clear blue Running Pony handstamp tying a Wells, Fargo & Co. \$1.00 red (Sc. 143L3) to a 10¢ green entire (Sc. U32) with a red Wells, Fargo & Co. printed frank. Addressed to New York City, it still contains the original letter, datelined "Pony Express, San Francisco, Sept 11th 1861". It was carried by the Pony Express



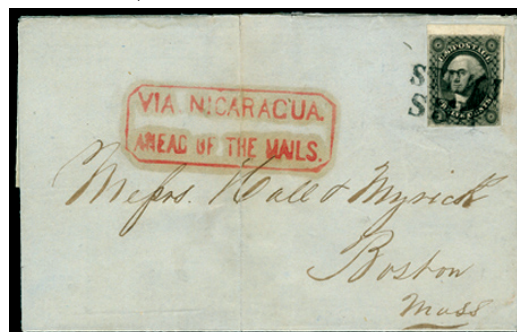
and entered the U.S. mails with a double circle "Atchison, Kan./Sep 23" postmark. As described, "This cover was carried eastbound over the entire

route during the third period when the rate was \$1.00. The eastern terminus had been changed from St. Joseph, Missouri to Atchison, Kansas in September of 1861. Estimated at \$10,000-15,000, it sold for \$35,000.

Among other routes, we have this folded letter with an "Independent Line, Ahead of the Mails, Via Panama, Uncle Sam and North Star" double



oval handstamp. It is datelined "San Francisco 1st Sep 1854" and franked by two 3¢ dull red (Sc. 11) and, per the lot description, "was carried by steamship Uncle Sam to Panama where there were connections with the S.S. North Star for the run to New York; however, [in Panama] it was turned over to the British Post Office...and then carried direct by British mail steamer to London....the U.S. stamps were required for mail carried privately and remained uncanceled. The Independent Line was organized by Commodore Vanderbilt as an opposition line between California and New York via Panama in September of 1853. Estimated at \$1,000-1,500, this cover went for \$2,200.



Here's an example of another private mail route. This double rate folded letter bears a "Via Nicaragua, Ahead of the Mails" red boxed handstamp. Addressed to Boston, it is datelined "San Francisco Sept 1st 1853" and entered the mails with a top sheet-margin 12¢ black (Sc. 17) tied by a two-line straightline "STEAM/SHIP" handstamp of New York. Per the lot description, "The writer advises that he has made shipments via the Clipper ships Staffordshire & Golden Fleece and that 'I have only time to write...which I forward by the Nicaragua Steamer the mails having closed.' This handstamp was used on mail carried by the Accessory Transit Company of William Vanderbilt, who obtained a concession from Nicaragua to operate across that country between New York and San Francisco. It operated without a U.S. mail contract. Estimated at \$2,000-3,000, it was hammered down for \$11,000.