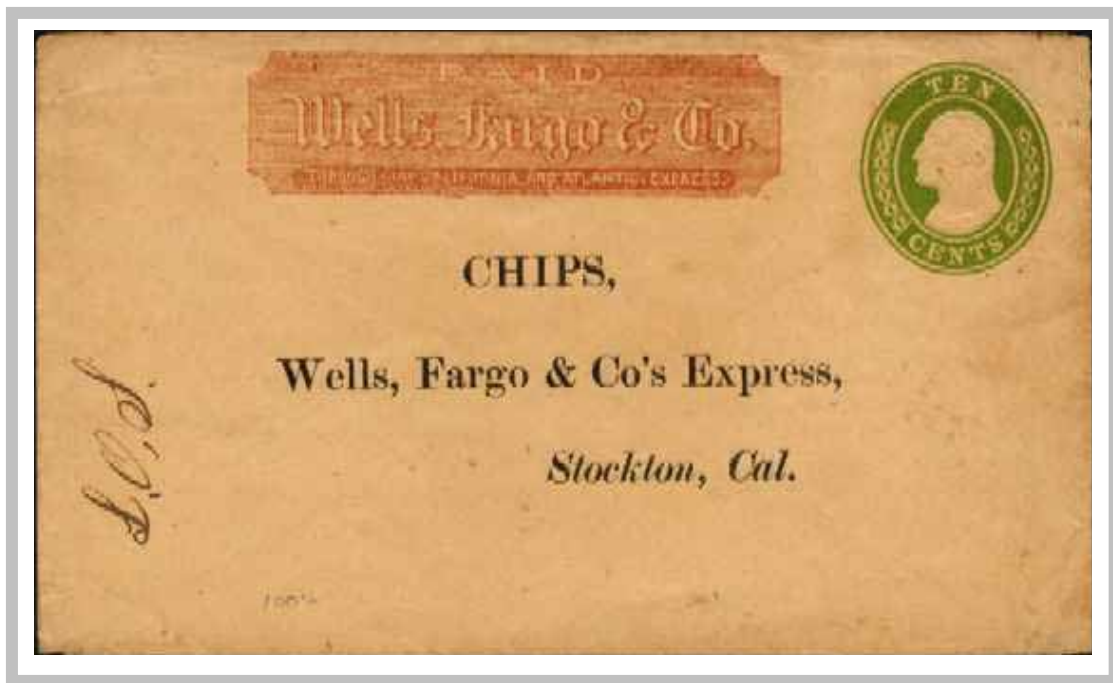


The Chips Covers – The Postal History Legacy of a Wells Fargo Agent



Chips, whose real name was Pilsbury Hodgkins, acquired his nickname as a ship's carpenter 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 Pre-Wells Fargo 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 in effect from July 1, 1851 through March 30, 1855.

Addressee was in the gold fields east of Stockton and likely left instructions at the Stockton post office for delivery of mail. Numeral “6” rate markings are unusual, as few postmasters had enough transcontinental mail to justify the purchase of the handstamp.

Pilsbury Hodgkins, like many of his day, was infected with Gold Fever. In 1849, he and some friends boarded the sailing ship *York* for California. Hodgkins hired on as a ship's carpenter and, as such, earned the nickname “Chips.” After arriving at San Francisco, they proceeded to Stockton, where they hired a team of oxen and a cart, and made their way to the gold fields of Tuolumne County. In addition to mining for gold, Hodgkins also worked part time as a mounted messenger for several express companies in the Southern Mines, delivering mail and gold to San Francisco.

The Chips Covers Pre-Wells Fargo Mail



Forwarded by Browns Express. Blue double-line oval handstamp and “50Cts” 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. 50 cent charge 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.

The Chips Covers By US Mail From Boston



January 4, 1857. Boston, MA, via Panama, to Stockton, CA. “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.” Postage paid by imperforate 10¢ green adhesive.

Likely transported from Boston to Stockton by US Mails, as there are no Wells Fargo markings or franks to indicate private express carriage.

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.

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.

Fewer than five covers with this Boston return address design have been recorded.

The Chips Covers

Boston Office 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
New York Office Correspondence



January 21. New York, via Panama, to Stockton, California. “WELLS, FARGO & Co. EXPRESS / NEW YORK / JAN 21” blue circular datestamp. Carried outside of the mails from company offices in New York to Stockton, CA. No Wells, Fargo & Co. charges on internal correspondence.

The Chips Covers Personal Correspondence

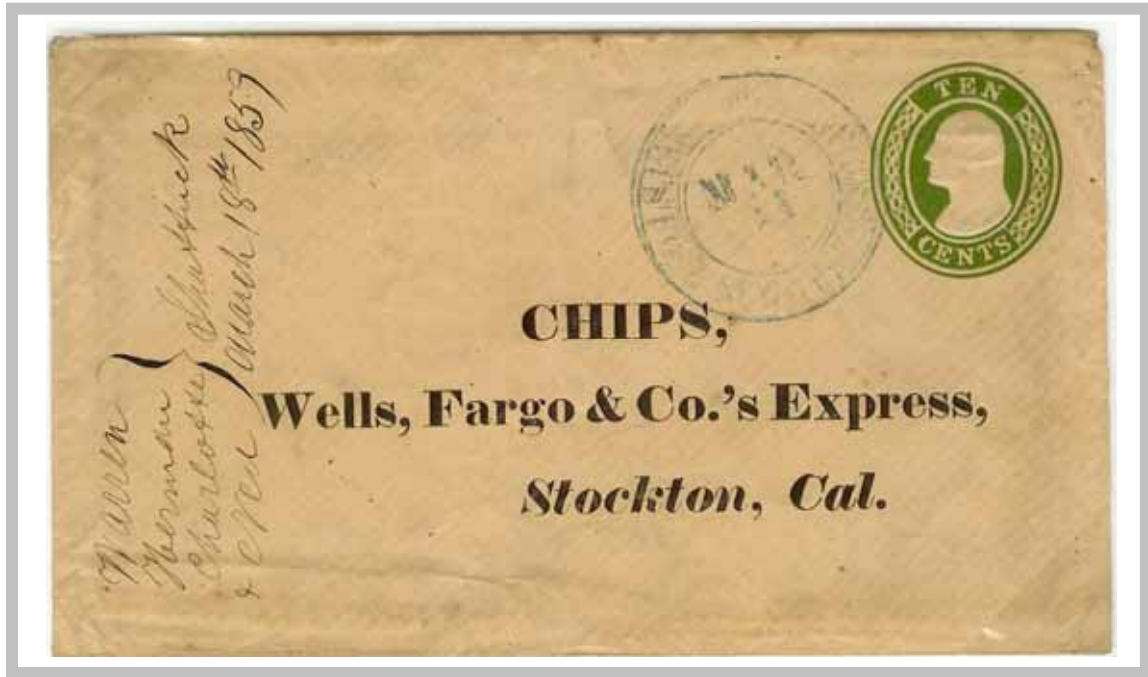


March 20. New York, via Panama, to Stockton, California. “WELLS, FARGO & Co. EXPRESS / NEW YORK / MAR 20” blue circular datestamp. Carried outside of the mails from company offices in New York to Stockton, CA. Manuscript “Family Records / Hodgkins Family”

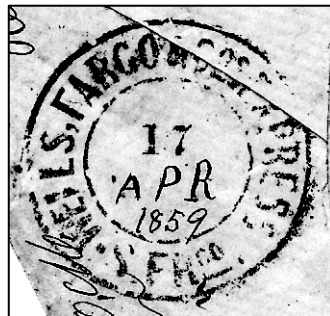
Manuscript notations on this and other covers indicates that Wells Fargo carried Chips’ personal correspondence free of express charges. Chips likely made these preaddressed envelopes available to his family and friends, in addition to their likely having been used for internal correspondence. Docketing 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

Pre-Addressed Envelopes Without Printed Franks

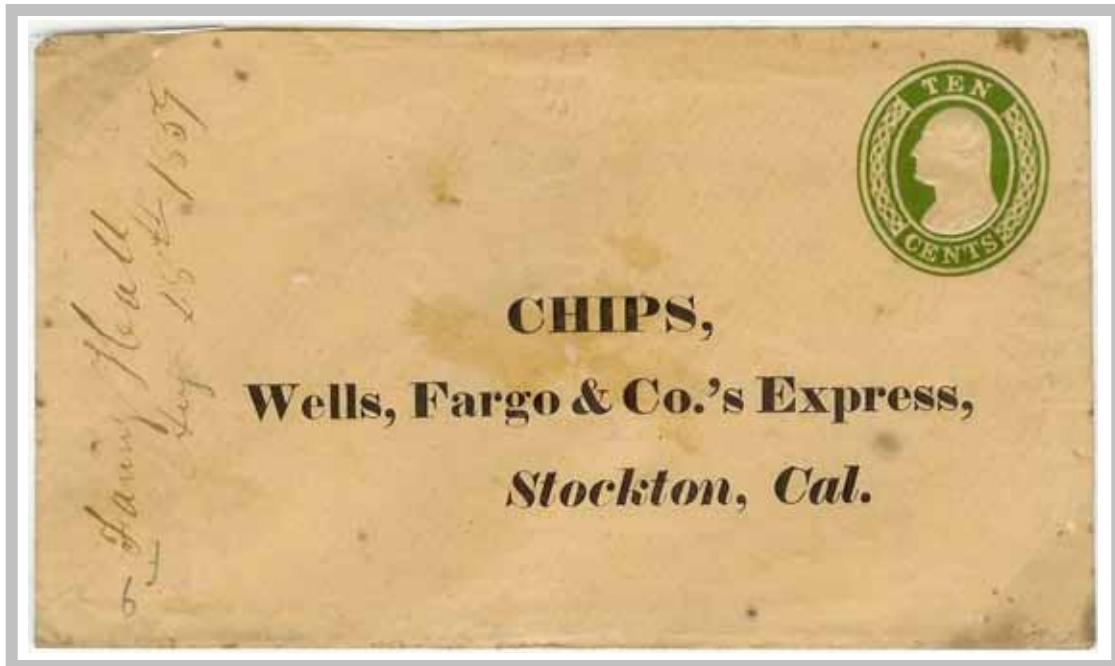


March 25, 1859. New York, via Panama, to Stockton, California with dated origination and transit circular datestamps. 10 cent postal stationary envelope, no Wells Fargo frank. Blue “WELLS, FARGO & Co. EXPRESS / NEW YORK / MAR / 25” circular datestamp. Blue “WELLS, FARGO & Co. EXPRESS / S FR^{co} / 17 ” circular datestamp with manuscript “APR / 1859” as transit office marking on verso.

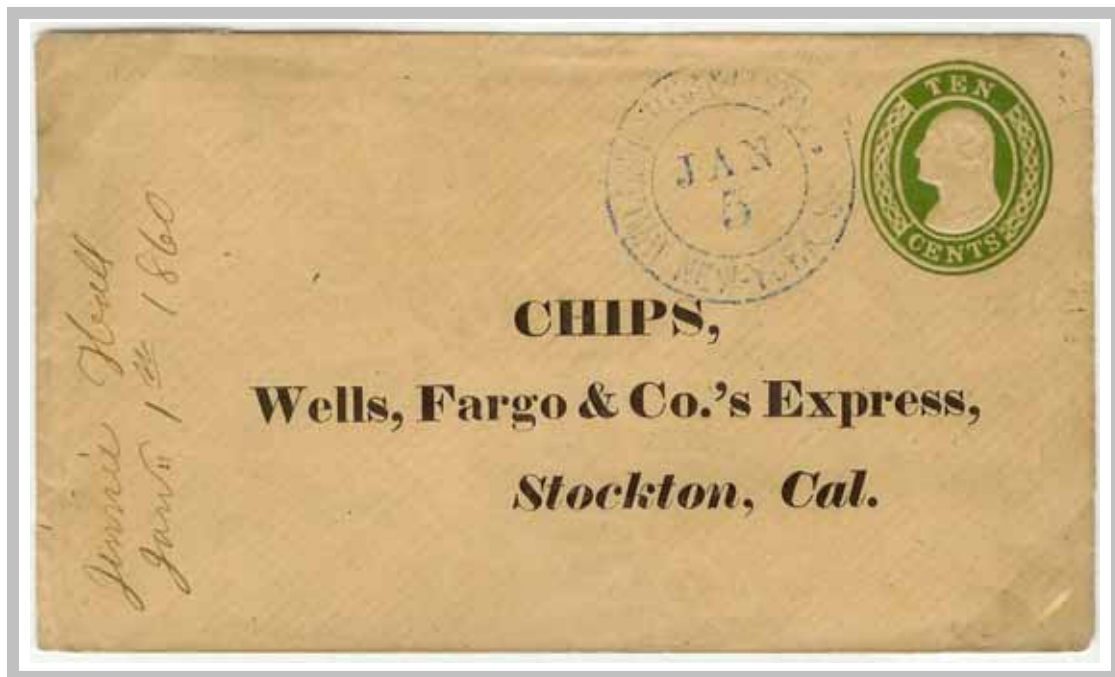


San Francisco datestamp
as transit office marking
on verso

The Chips Covers
Pre-Addressed Envelopes Without Printed Franks

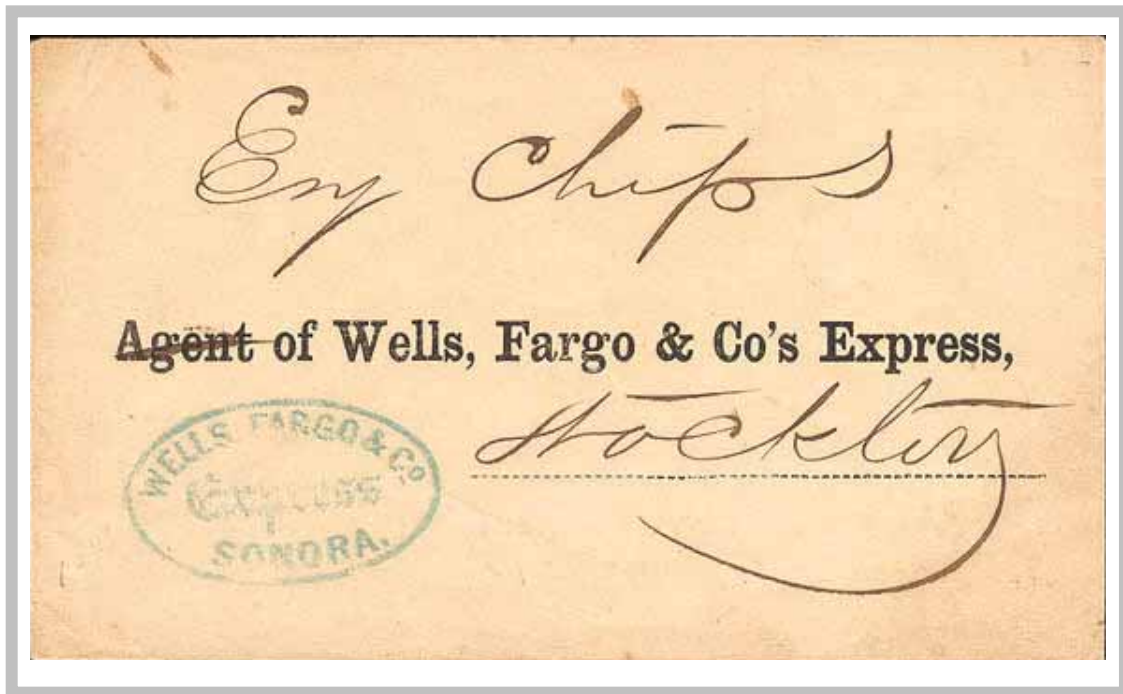


August, 1859. 10¢ postal stationary envelope with no frank or postmark. Docketed on reverse “Received Sept. 29th 1859 by Stage / Answered by return (mail) Express.” Carried free of express charges.



January 5, 1860. New York, New York to Stockton, California. 10¢ postal stationary envelope, no Wells Fargo frank. “Wells Fargo & Cos. Express / New York / Jan 5” Blue double circle cancellation.

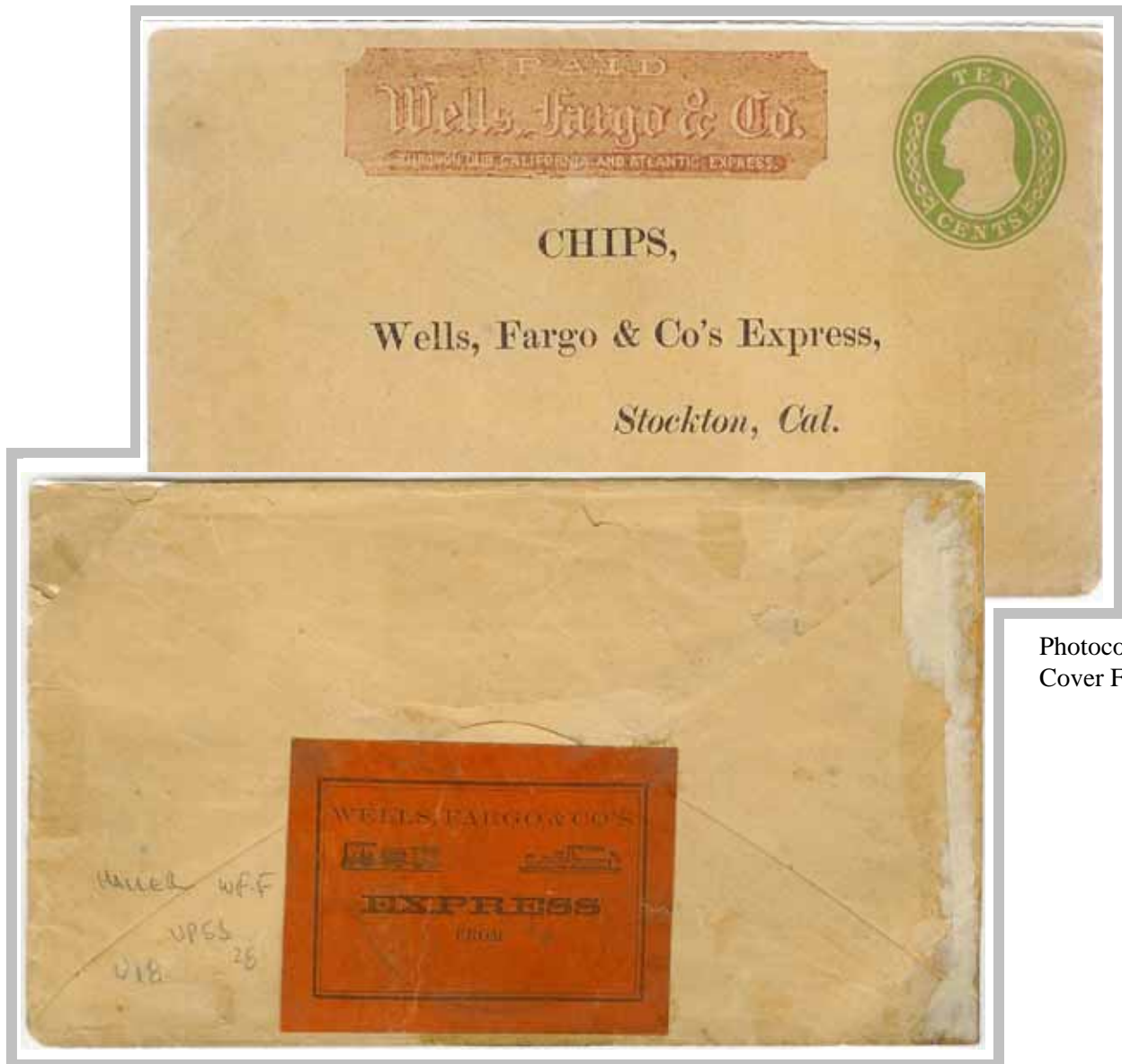
The Chips Covers
“Agent of Wells, Fargo & Co’s Express”



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
Orange Express Label – Gilroy, CA



Photocopy of
Cover Face

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.

The Chips Covers

Eastbound - Entering the Mails in Boston



March 3, 1860. Stockton, CA, via Panama, to Brookline, NH. 10¢ postal stationary envelope with red printed “PAID / Wells, Fargo & Co. / THROUGH OUR CALIFORNIA AND ATLANTIC EXPRESS.” frank. Blue “WELLS, FARGO & CO / MAR 3 / STOCKTON” datestamp on reverse. 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 California and West Coast Mail



Martinez, California. Black Wells, Fargo frank on 3¢ postal stationary. 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.

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 Leutzinger. Wallula, WT was listed as a Wells, Fargo office as of 1864.

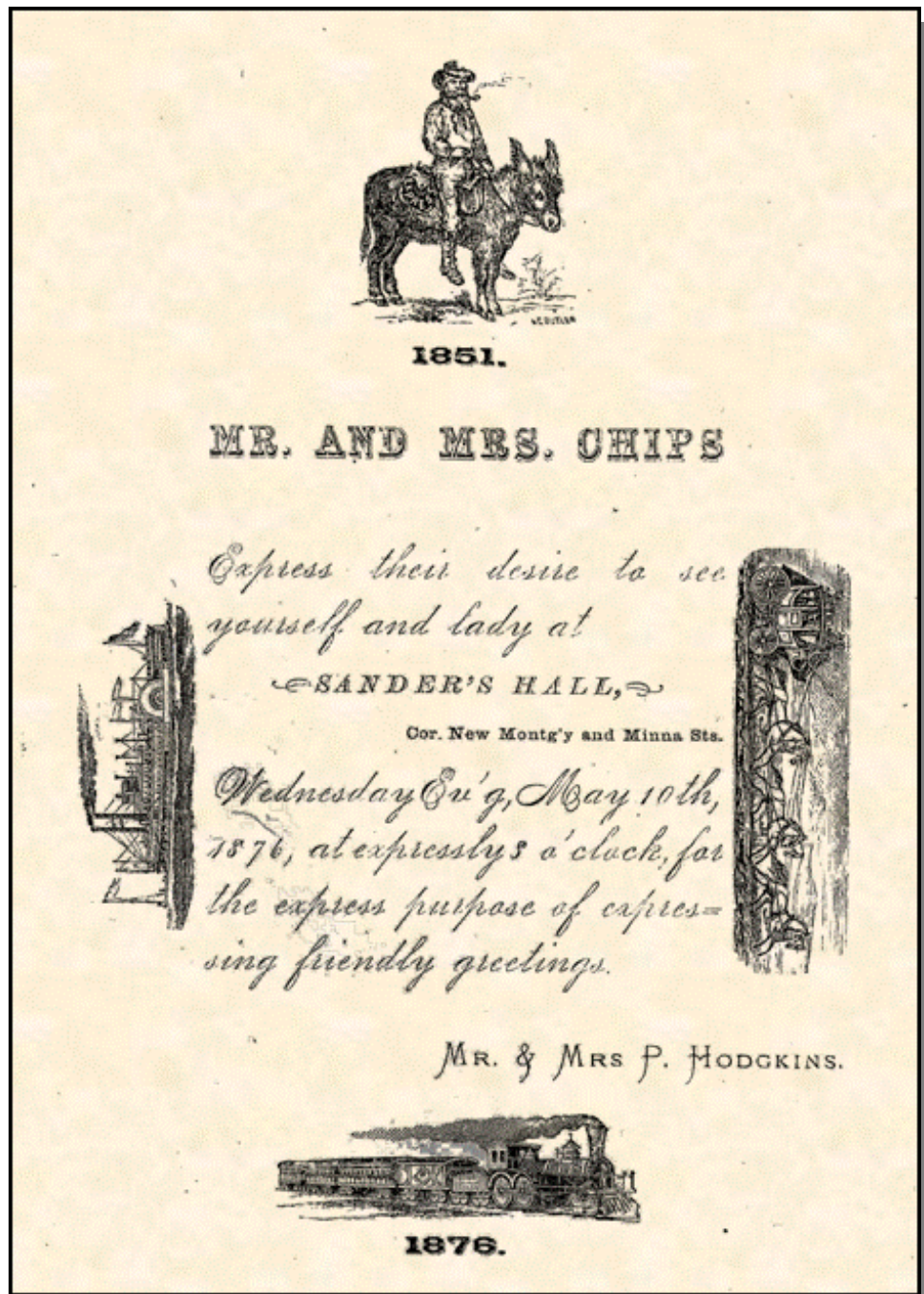


WALLULA W(T)

Illustration of handstamp
(unrecorded)

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