



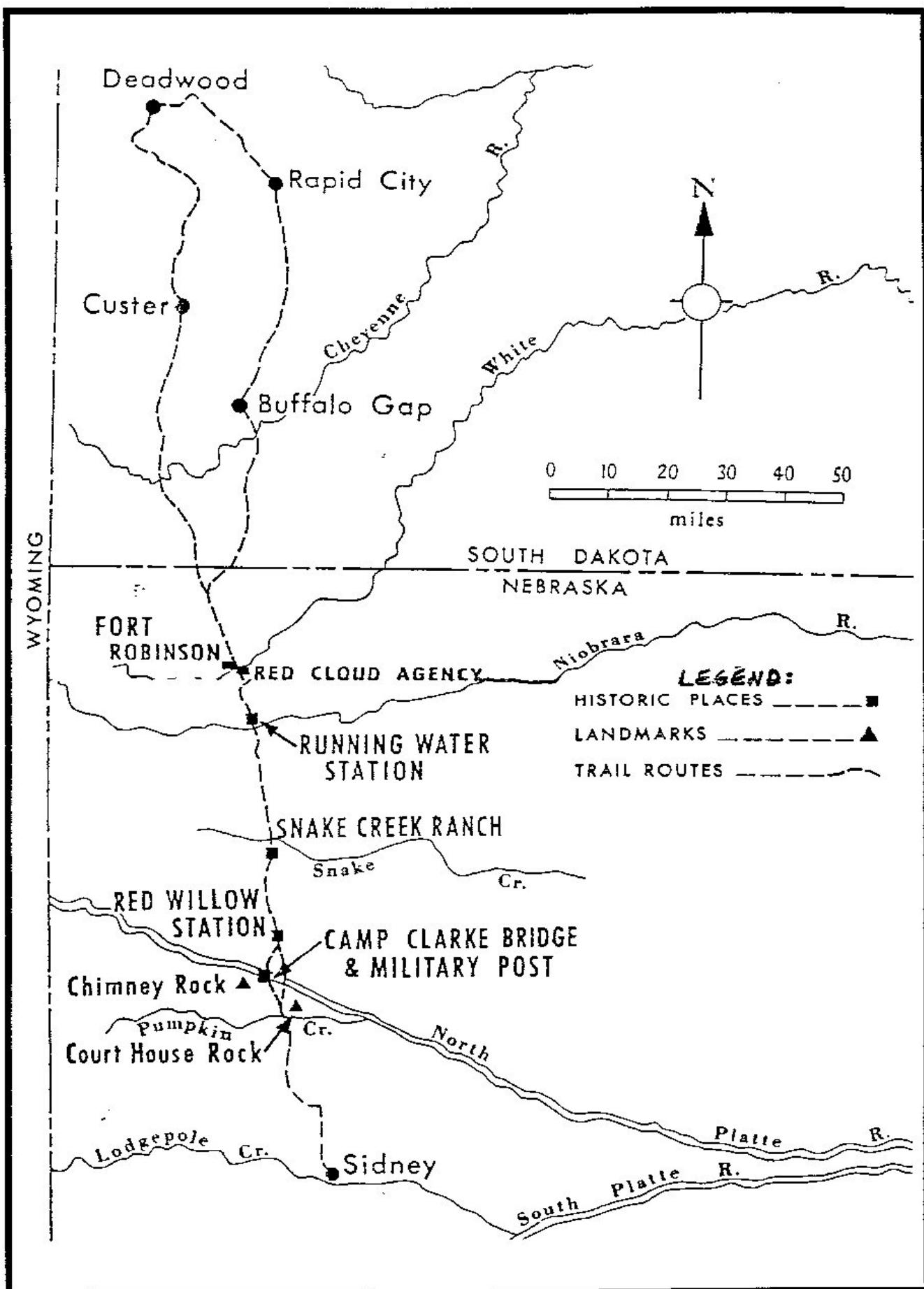
Hon. Henry Tefft Clarke

Founder of Clarke's Centennial Express to the Black Hills

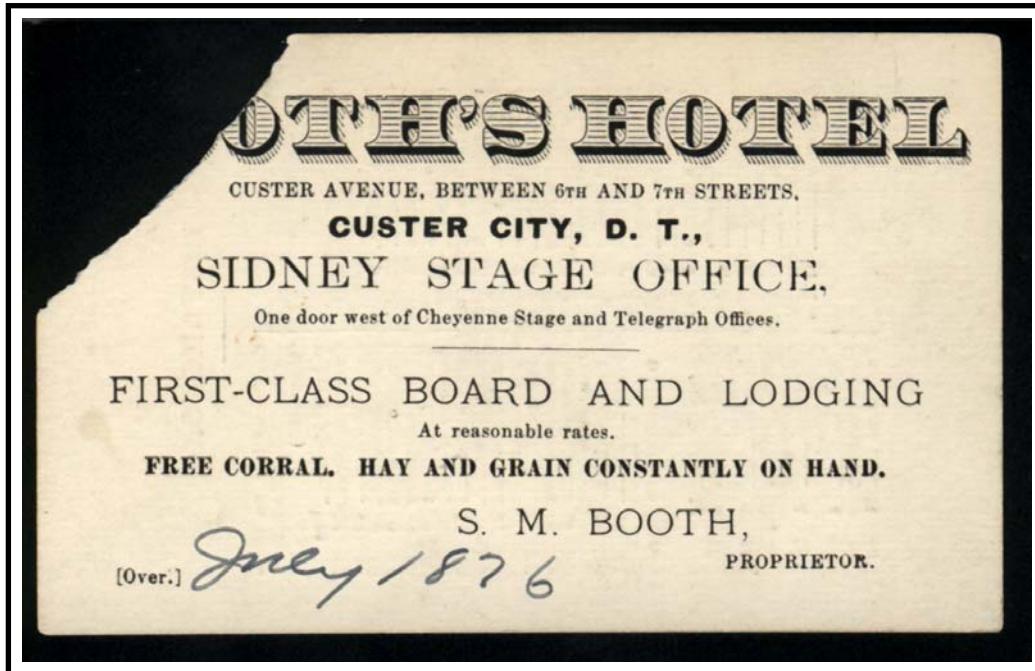
Also known as the "Sidney Short Route"

H.T. Clarke established his express into the Black Hills of South Dakota in the spring of 1876 to provide mail service to the various mining camps, as the US Post Office Department had refused service into the area it still considered "Indian country". Clarke raised \$3000 from merchants and residents of Sidney, Nebraska to build a bridge over the North Platte River, some 40 miles north of Sidney, thereby establishing the "Sidney Short Route" on May 10, 1876 when the bridge was completed.

Clarke initially operated a Pony Express to and from the Black Hills in 1876, but discontinued this service due to the excessive cost. He then had envelopes franked with information about his route, which he sold at the Black Hills mining camps, Omaha, Chicago and some railroad ticket offices. Clarke contracted with Marsh & Stephenson to carry the mails for the "Centennial Express", which operated into 1877 despite continuing poor financial performance.



Map of the Sidney to Black Hills Trail over which operated “Clarke’s Centennial Express”



Booth's Hotel, Custer City, D.T. (July, 1876)

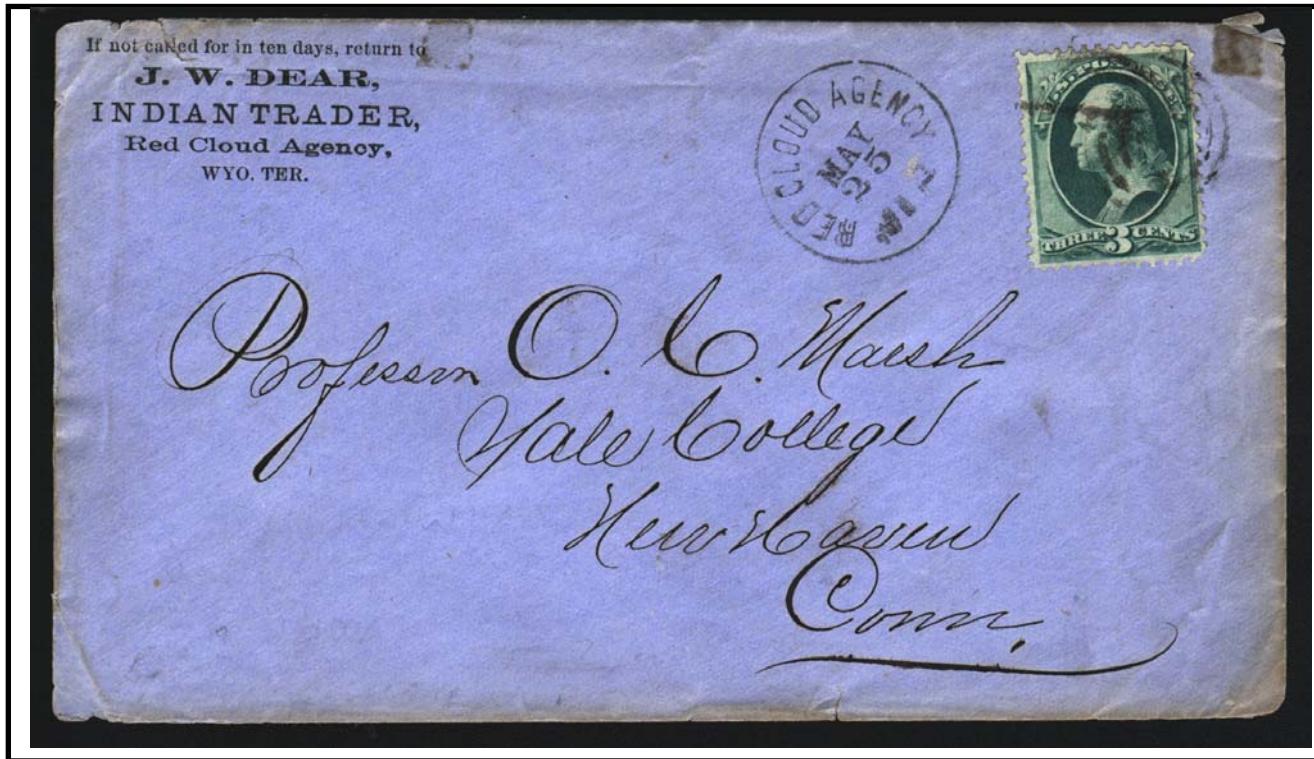
“Sidney Stage Office” card with mileages from Custer City to Sidney and other stage stations on reverse (below)

Apparently, this card was used for both the Sidney Stage (Clarke's Centennial Express) and the Cheyenne & Black Hills Express

Alby Mr. Houser

DISTANCES.

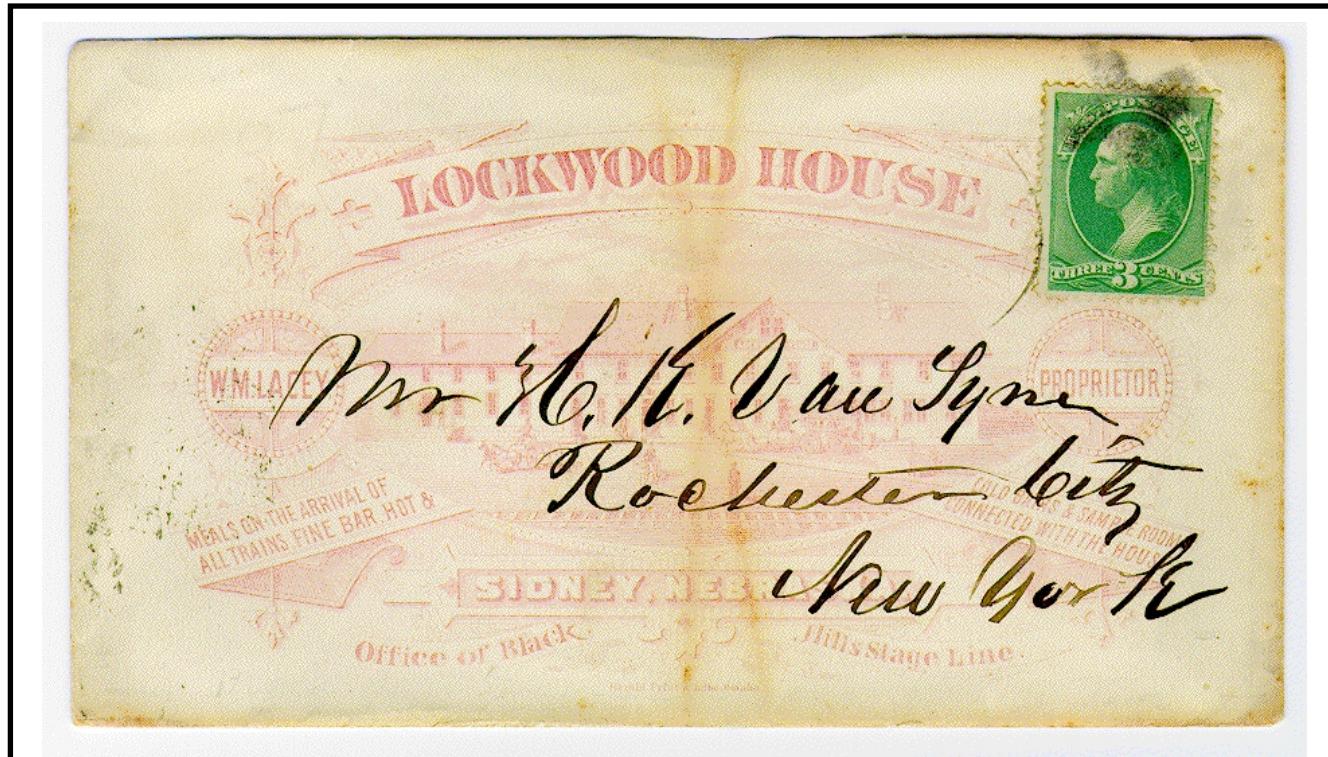
Custer City to Cheyenne.		Custer City to Sidney, via Homan's Cut-Off.)	
Pleasant Valley..	9	Point of Rocks....	10
Spring-on-Left....	12	Cheyenne River..	17 27
Down Red Canon	14	Junction.....	16 43
Red Canon.....	12	Big Cottonwood..	6 49
Cheyenne River..	4	LittleCottonwood	8 57
Prairie Spring....	18	RedCloudAgency	6 63
Up Indian Creek	12	White Clay Creek	6 69
Indian Creek....	19	Running Water ..	10 79
Hat Creek.....	8	Potts' Ranche....	14 93
Running Water...	15	Snake River	12 105
RawHide Springs	8	Red Willow.....	12 117
Raw Hide.....	10	Platte River	
Governm'nt farm	12	Bridge	10 127
Gov'm'nt Bridge	12	Court HouseRock	8 135
Fort Laramie....	2	Greenwood	8 143
Six Mile Ranche	6	Water Hole	
Eagle's Nest.....	10	Ranche	12 155
Chug Springs....	7	Sidney	12 167
Hunton's Ranch	4		
Chimney Rock, P. O.	4	Custer City to Deadwood.	
Chug Water.....	10	Spring Creek ...	12
Bear Springs....	14	Mountain City..	9 21
Horse Creek....	10	Reynolds'	
Pole Creek.....	10	Ranch	3½ 24½
Cheyenne.....	18	Rapid Creek....	3½ 28
		North Rapid	
		Creek.....	4 32
		Cold Spring	
		Ranche	4 36
		Stone Ranche..	4 40
		Deadwood	11 51



Red Cloud Agency (May 25, ca1877)

J. W. Dear was the post trader at Red Cloud Indian Agency. Cancels from Red Cloud post office are known similar to this example (which has no territory or state noted), but with "Neb." or Wyo" territorial designations. The agency offices moved frequently which, coupled with the fact that this area was still rather "wild" and uncharted, probably led to the postmaster's confusion.

Red Cloud Agency was 104 miles north on the Sidney to Black Hills Trail from Sidney, Nebraska or 63 miles south from Custer City, Dakota. It is possible that this cover was carried on Clarke's Express. The addressee, Professor O. C. Marsh at Yale College, was a noted paleontologist of his time and was known to have received fossils from the Badlands of southwestern South Dakota.



Lockwood House - Sidney, Nebraska “Office of Black Hills Stage Line”

The enclosed letter, dated Mar 15, 1882, is shown below. Clarke's Centennial Express had long since expired by the time this cover was mailed; however, the Lockwood House was still used as the Stage Station



**Sloan, Ioa (Oct 31, 1876)
with “(via Sidney Pony Express)” at lower left**

Addressed to Deadwood, Black Hills, D.T. This cover entered the Black Hills of South Dakota on the Sidney Short Route, from Sidney Nebraska and was carried by H.T. Clarke's “Pony Express”, which operated for only a few months in 1876. This cover is dated by the 1876 letter enclosed.

There are no less than 13 varieties of the Clarke's Centennial Express franked envelopes. H. T. Clarke had Joseph P. Gossage, founder and editor of "*The Sidney Telegraph*", print the franks on the Plimpton issue of printed stamped envelopes of 1876 (Scott numbers U218, U219 and U 221). U218 is vermillion on white paper, while the other two are die varieties in green on white paper. Clarke either under-estimated the required number of envelopes or simply didn't want to tie up funds in them (costs per thousand of the vermillion and green entires were \$33.00 and \$32.80 respectively).

Len Persson, in his July 1988 LaPosta article, provided a system to "type" the various imprinted franks. He based his system on:

1.) Headlines

Headline A: "Sidney Short Route"

Headline B: "Clarke's Centennial Express to the Black Hills

2.) Text

Abbreviated using the first letter in each of the first three lines (excepting headlines), i.e., "IOP", "IWT", "IPF", "OCS".

3.) Number of lines in the text

A line is not counted if "over" is the only word

4.) Relative position of word "over" or words "see other side"

5.) Color of frank

6.) Miscellaneous features

The various "Persson Types" of Clarke's franks are outlined on the following page.

Persson Type 1

Headline A, "IOP", 7 lines, no "over" of "see other side", black ink on U218 (3c vermillion)

Persson Type 2

Headline A above B, "IWT", 6 lines, "over" directly under "at Sid", green ink on U218 (3c vermillion)

Persson Type 2a

Same as Type 2, except green ink on U219 (3c green, Die 1)

Persson Type 3

Same as Type 2, except greyish-blue ink on U218 (3c vermillion)

Persson Type 4

Headline A above B, "IWT", 6 lines, "see other side" in lower left corner, "Answer in care of H.T. Clarke, Sidney, Neb" up left side, "Care H.T. Clarke, Sidney, Neb." in two lines at lower left, green ink on U218 (3c vermillion)

Persson Type 5

Headline A above B, "IPF", 6 lines, "over" centered under "Pac", black ink on U218 (3c vermillion)

Persson Type 6

Headline B above "The Sidney Short Route" – separated by "via", "OCS", 3 lines, "see other side" in lower left corner, "Answer in care of H.T. Clarke Sidney, Neb" in two lines in lower left, green ink on U219 (3c green, Die 1)

Persson Type 7

Headline A above B separated by horizontal line, "IPF", 6 lines, "over" under "Union", black ink on U221 (3c green, Die 2, double line under Postage)

Persson Type 8

Same as Type 7, except green ink on U221

Persson Type 9

Headline A above B, "IWT", 6 lines, "over" in lower left corner, green ink on U218 (3c vermillion)

Persson Type 10

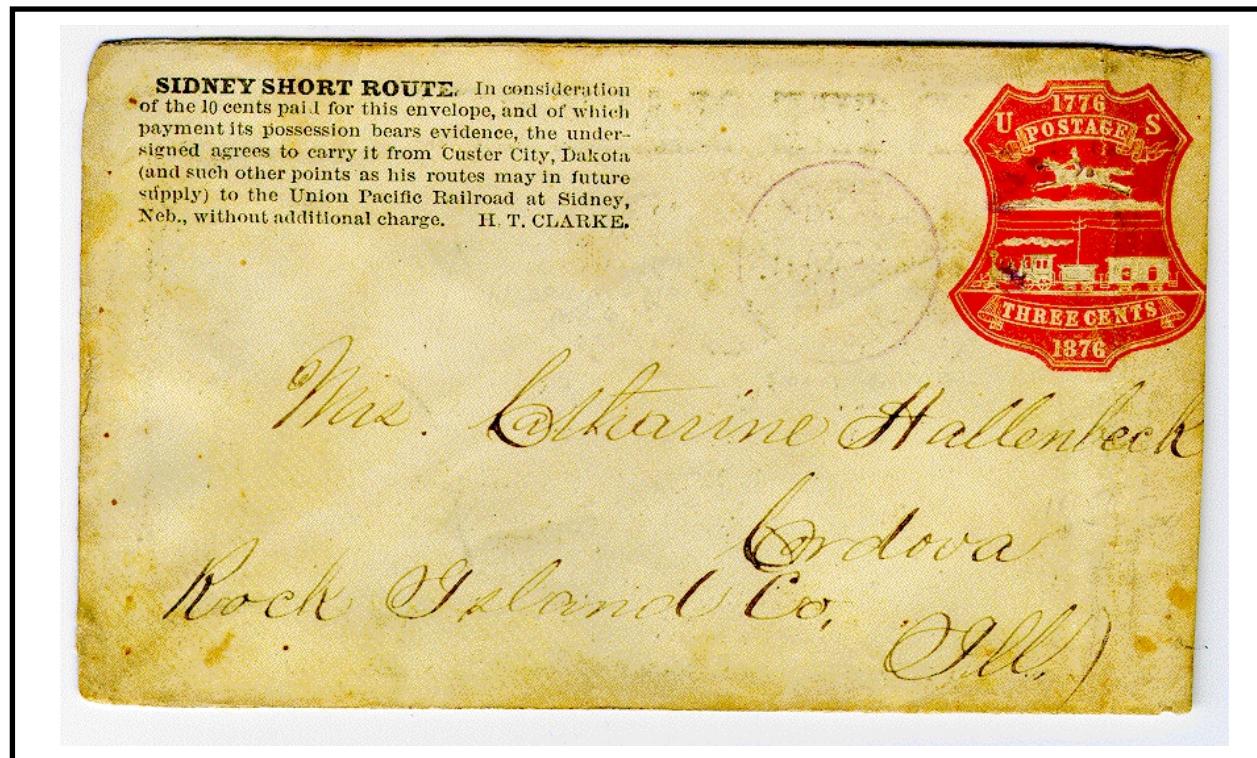
Headline A above B separated by horizontal line, "IWT", 6 lines, "see other side" in lower Left corner, "Care H.T. Clarke, Sidney, Neb." in two lines at lower left, green ink on U219 (3c Green, Die 1)

Persson Type 11

Headline A above B separated by horizontal line, "IWT", 6 lines, "over" under "at Sid", "Care H.T. Clarke, Sidney, Neb." in two lines at lower left, green ink on U219 (3c green, Die 1)

Persson Type 11a

Same as Type 11, except U221 (3c green, Die 2, double line under Postage)



Sidney, Neb. (Aug 6, ca1876) – Persson Type 1 imprint
 Virtually all the known Clarke's covers entered the mails at Sidney, Neb.

HO! FOR THE BLACK HILLS!

New 61 Span Truss Bridge over the Platte River
40 MILES NORTH OF SIDNEY,
 IS NOW OPEN FOR TRAVEL, AND IS
Guarded by the United States Troops.
ONLY 167 MILES
From the Union Pacific Railroad to Custer City.

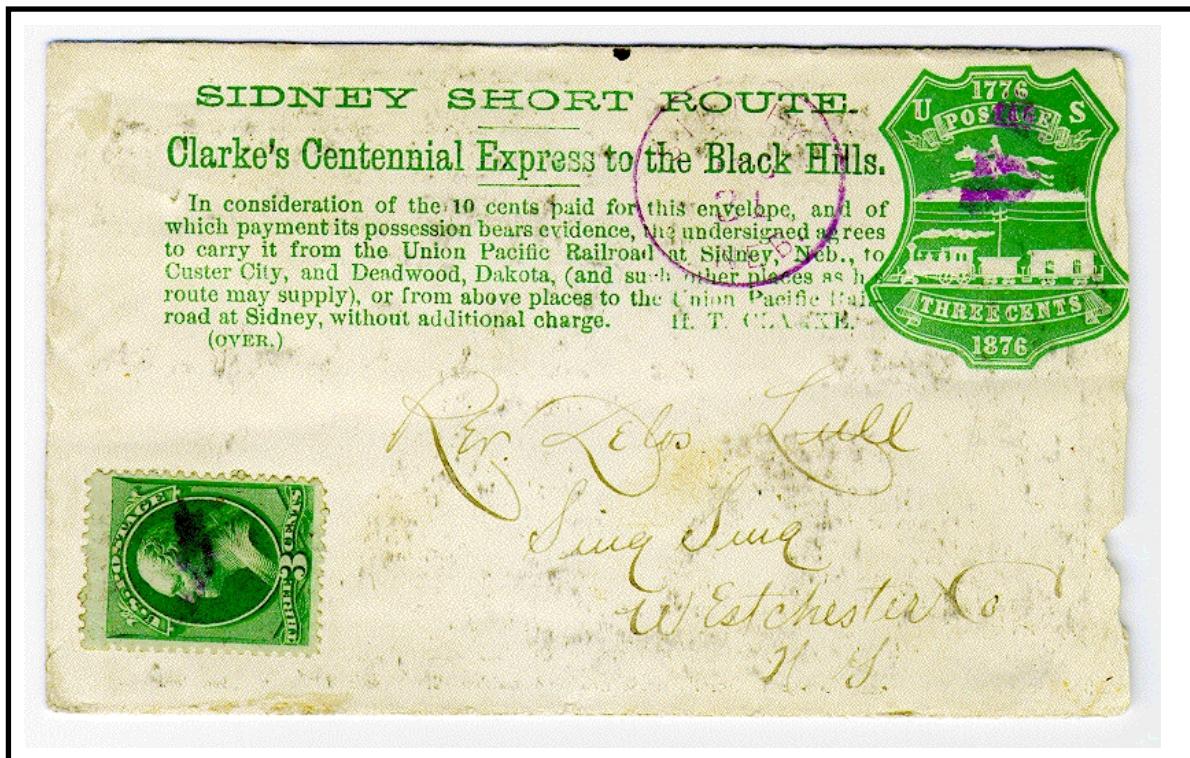
Wood and Water in Abundance, and the Finest Roads in the World by this Route. All Mail sent in care of H. T. CLARKE, SIDNEY AND CAMP CLARKE, PLATTE RIVER BRIDGE, will be forwarded as directed. Sidney is now a good out-fitting point. Large supply of Grain, Groceries, Hardware and Produce always on hand. Hotel accommodations good.

TOTAL DISTANCE FROM SIDNEY TO CUSTER CITY **167 MILES**. This distance is by the road now traveled between the two Agencies. Dear's Sidney and Black Hills Stage Line leaves this route at Snake River, running through to Red Cloud Indian Agency in **17** hours, and to Custer City in **36** hours. The distance by this route is **182** miles.

Our forwarding houses can furnish transportation for **250.000** POUNDS at a shipment. FREIGHT CHARGES, Sidney to Custer City, range from **3** to **5** cents per pound. Freight shipped care H. T. Clarke, Sidney, Neb., will be shipped at lowest rates.

Passenger Rates—Omaha to Custer City, 1st class \$45.00, 2d class \$35.00, 3d class \$25.00

H. T. CLARKE FORWARDING AND COMMISSION MERCHANT, wholesale dealer in Grain, Groceries, Provisions, Wagon, Mowers and out-fitting Goods, SIDNEY, NEBRASKA. All orders filled and forwarded at the lowest rates of freight. Owing to the difficulty of getting mail through to and from the Black Hills, Mr. Clarke has had printed and placed on sale in Sidney and points in the Hills, Govt. money orders, similar to the old Pony Express, in which all mail must be enclosed to be forwarded by Clarke's Letter & Express to Custer City, Deadwood and other points. Price 10cts.



**Sidney, Neb. (Aug 31, ca1876) – Persson Type 2a imprint
Double rate cover to New York**

SIDNEY SHORT ROUTE
TO
THE BLACK HILLS.

**The New 61 Span Truss Bridge over the Platte River,
40 Miles North of Sidney,**
IS NOW OPEN FOR TRAVEL, AND, WITH THE ROAD, IS
Guarded by the United States Troops.

ONLY 167 MILES TO CUSTER CITY
FROM THE UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD.

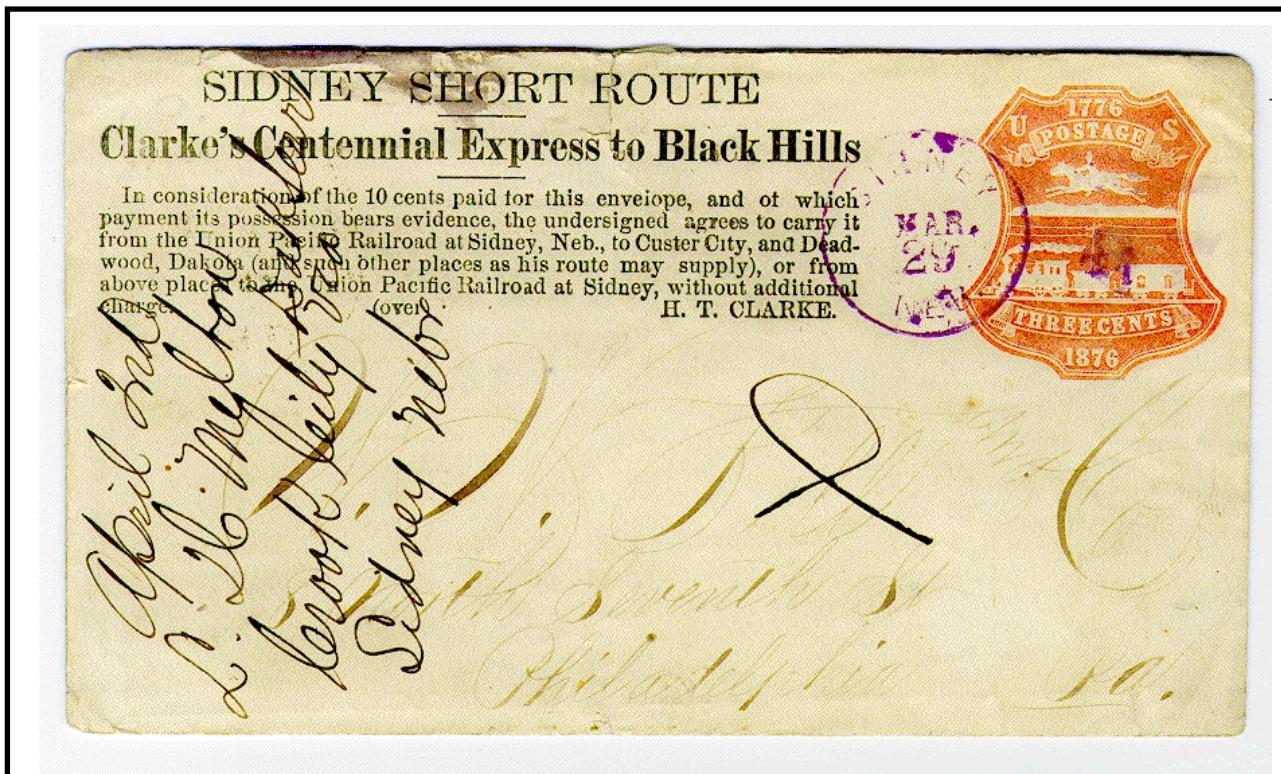
~~W~~ood, Water in abundance, and the Finest Roads in the World by this Route. All Mail sent in care of H. T. CLARKE, Sidney, and Camp Clarke, Platte River Bridge, will be forwarded as directed. Sidney is now a good out fitting point. Large supply of Grain, Groceries, Hardware, and Produce always on hand. Hotel accommodations good.

TOTAL DISTANCE FROM SIDNEY TO CUSTER CITY **167 MILES**. This distance is by the road now traveled between the two Agencies. Dear's Sidney and Black Hills Stage Line leaves this route and Snake River, running through to Red Cloud Indian Agency in **17** hours, and to Custer City in **36** hours. The distance by this route is **182** miles.

Our forwarding houses can furnish transportation for **250 000** POUNDS at a shipment. FREIGHT CHARGES, Sidney to Custer City, range from **3** to **5** cents per pound. Freight shipped care H. T. Clarke, Sidney, Neb., will be shipped at lowest rates.

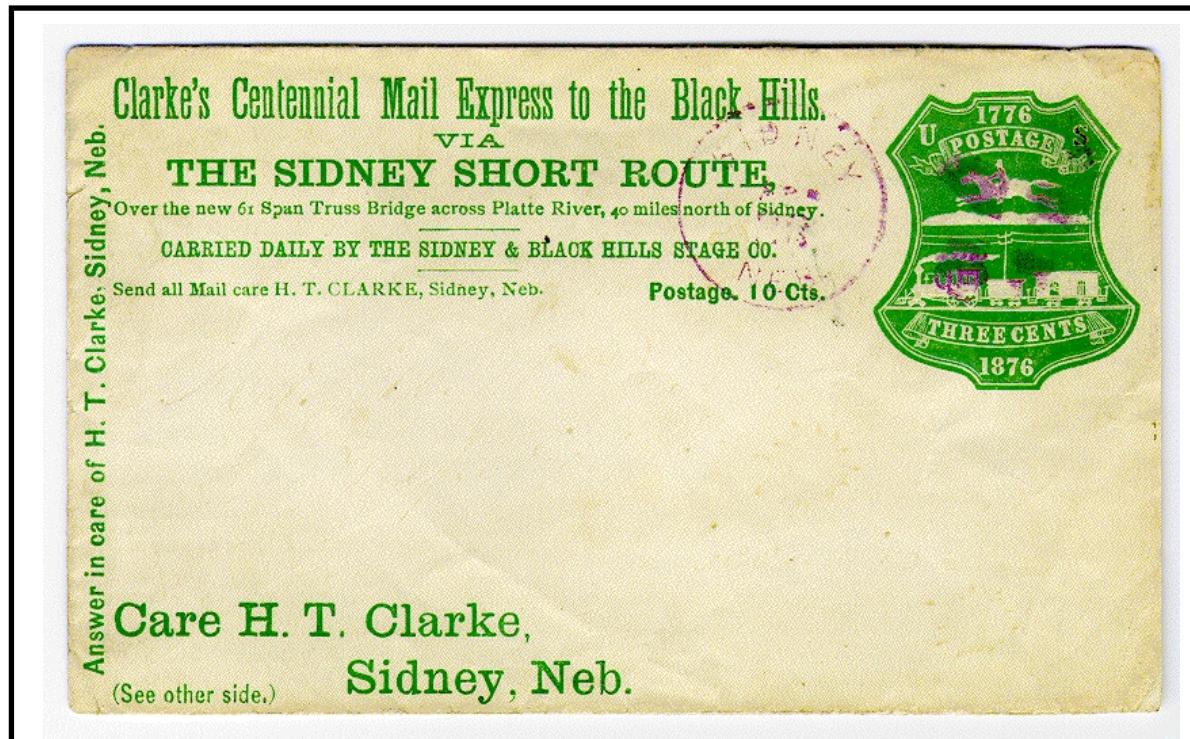
PASSENGER RATES — Omaha to Custer City, 1st class \$45, 2d class \$35, 3d class, \$25.

Tickets for sale at Union Pacific Railroad and principal Railroad Ticket Offices East.

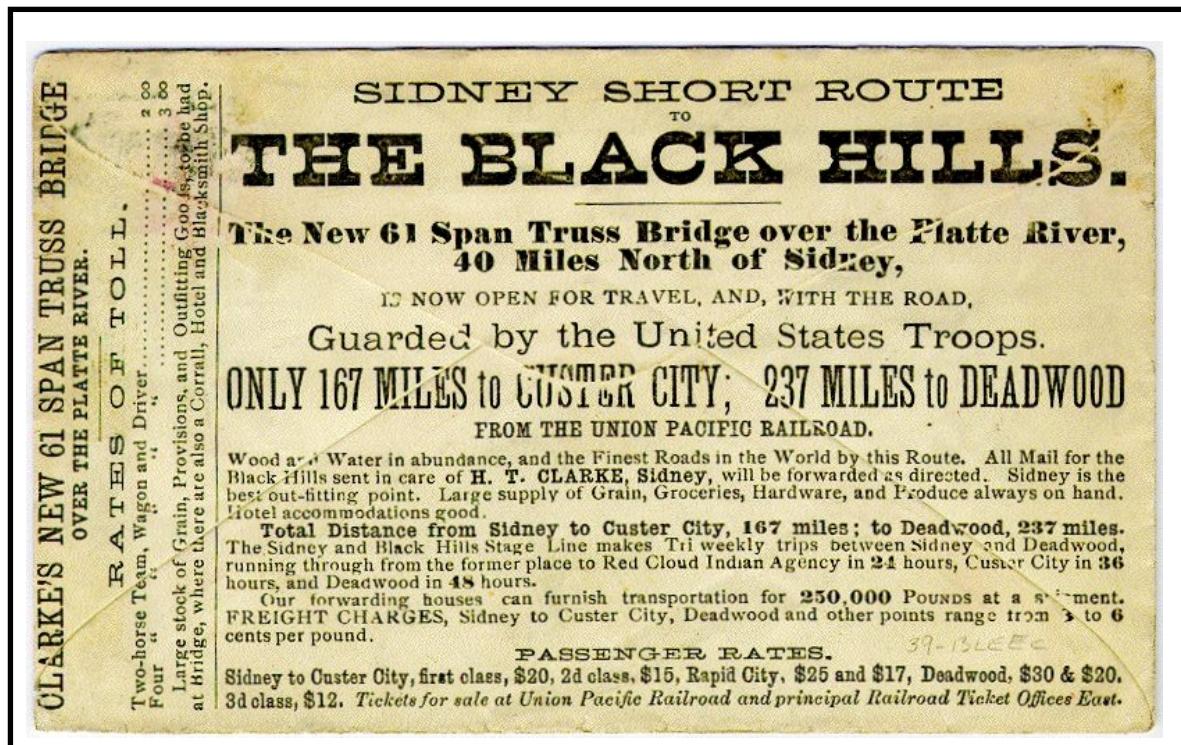


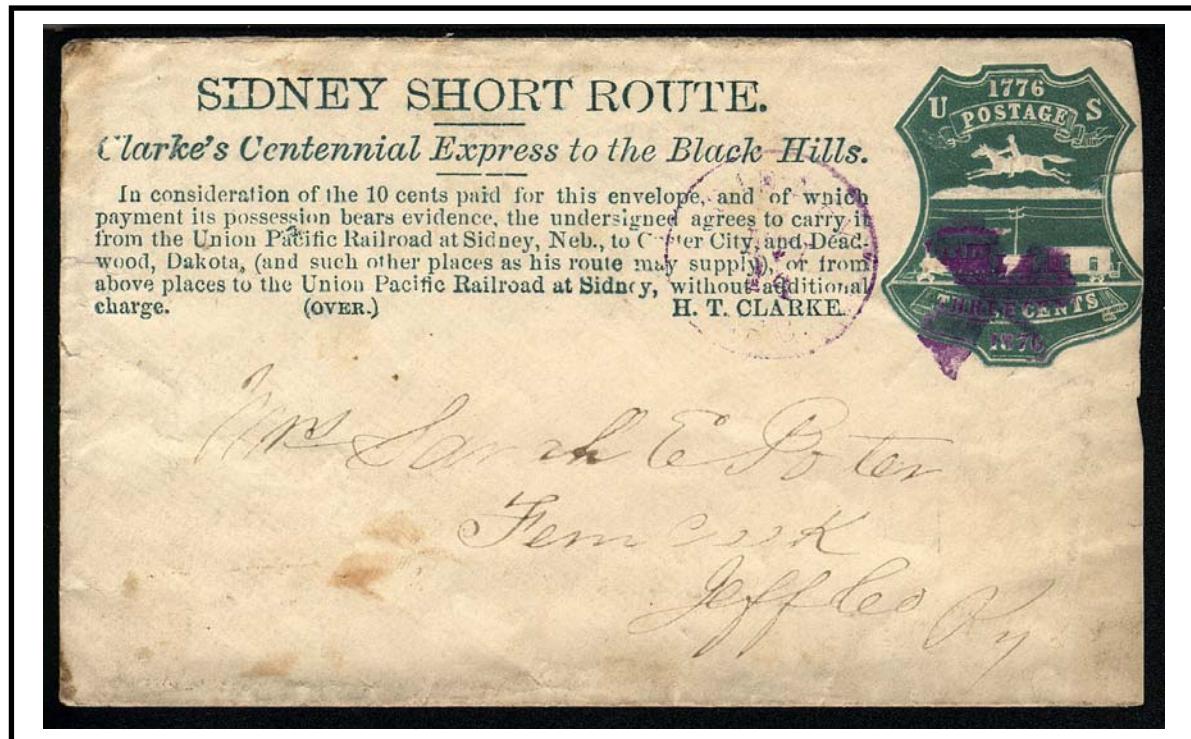
Sidney, Neb. (Apr 23, ca1877) – Persson Type 5 imprint
Mailed from Crook City, Dakota with notation “via Sidney, Nebr”



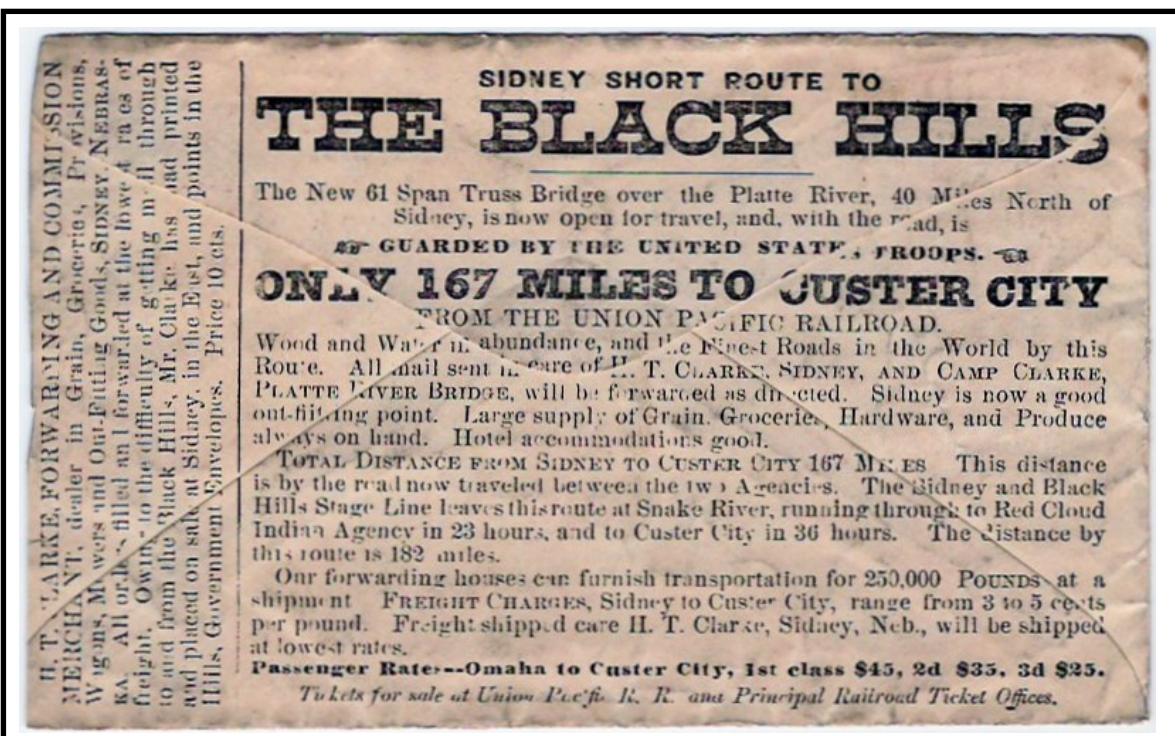


Sidney, Neb. (Apr 23, ca1877) – Persson Type 6 imprint
 “Answer in care of H.T. Clarke, Sidney, Neb.” printed up left side





Sidney, Neb. (Nov 16, ca1876) – Persson Type 8 imprint
 This variety notes that Clarke charged 10c for his stamped envelopes



SIDNEY SHORT ROUTE.

Clarke's Centennial Express to the Black Hills.

In consideration of the 10 cents paid for this envelope, and of which payment its possession bears evidence, the undersigned agrees to carry it from the Union Pacific Railroad at Sidney, Neb., to Custer City, and Deadwood, Dakota, (and such other places as his route may supply), or from above places to the Union Pacific Railroad at Sidney, without additional charge. H. T. CLARKE.



N. Sheldon Esq
Omaha
Care H T. Clarke,
Sidney, Neb.

(See other side.)

Dech

(circa 1877) – Persson Type 10 imprint

This cover, addressed to Omaha, Neb, was never cancelled by the post office

SIDNEY SHORT ROUTE TO **THE BLACK HILLS.**

**The New 61 Span Truss Bridge over the Platte River,
40 Miles North of Sidney,**

IS NOW OPEN FOR TRAVEL, AND, WITH THE ROAD, IS
Guarded by the United States Troops.

ONLY 167 MILES to CUSTER CITY; 237 MILES to DEADWOOD
FROM THE UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD.

Wood and Water in abundance, and the Finest Roads in the World by this Route. All Mail sent in care of H. T. CLARKE, Sidney, and Camp Clarke, Platte River Bridge, will be forwarded as directed. Sidney is now a good outfitting point. Large supply of Grain, Groceries, Hardware, and Produce always on hand. Hotel accommodations good.

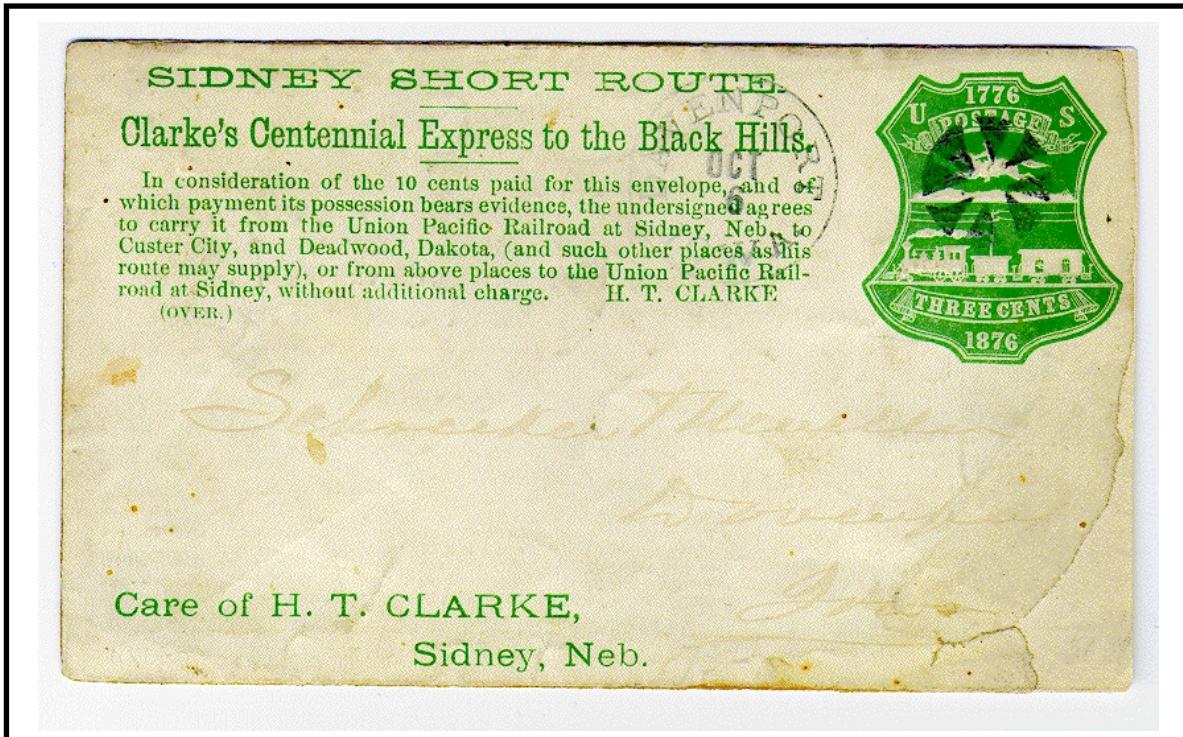
Total Distance from Sidney to Custer City, 167 miles; to Deadwood, 237 miles. This distance is by the road now traveled between the two Agencies. The Sidney and Black Hills Stage Line leaves this route and Snake River, running through to Red Cloud Indian Agency in 23 hours, and to Custer City in 36 hours. The distance by this route is 182 miles.

Our forwarding houses can furnish transportation for 250,000 Pounds at a shipment. FREIGHT CHARGES, Sidney to Custer City, range from 3 to 5 cents per pound. Freight shipped care H. T. Clarke, Sidney, Neb., will be shipped at lowest rates.

PASSENGER RATES – Omaha to Custer City, 1st class \$45. 2d class \$35, 3d class, \$25.

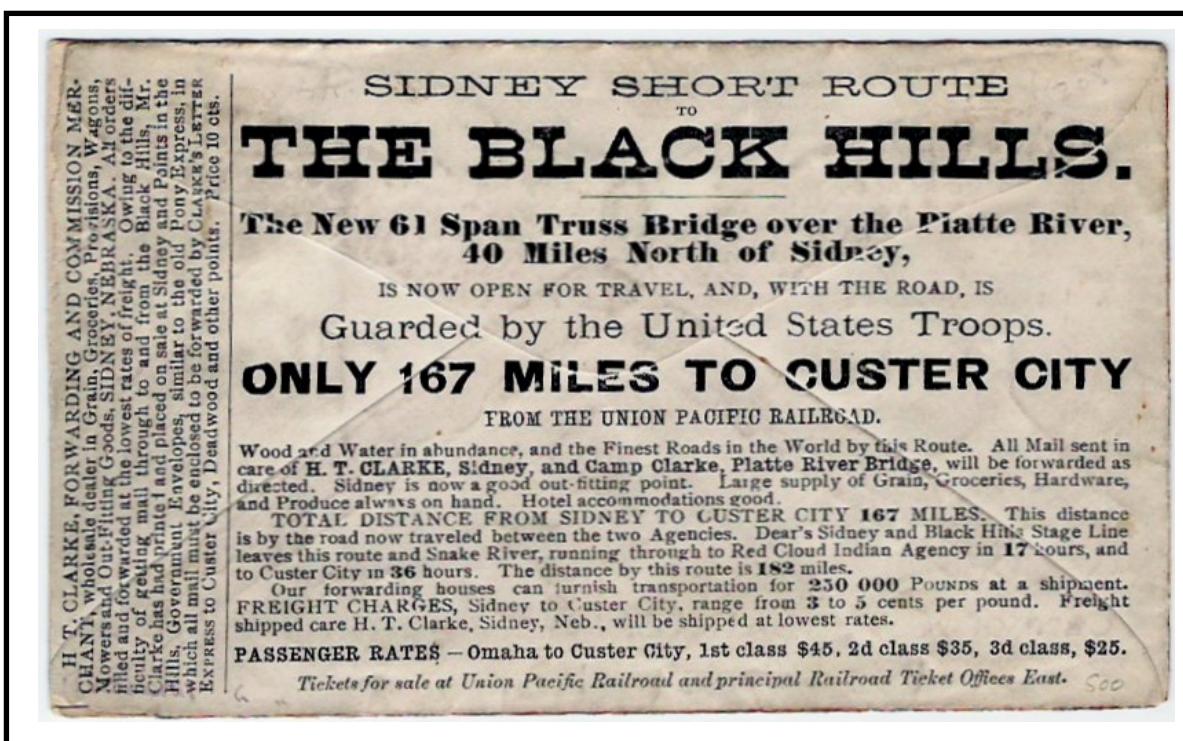
Tickets for sale at Union Pacific Railroad and principal Railroad Ticket Offices East.

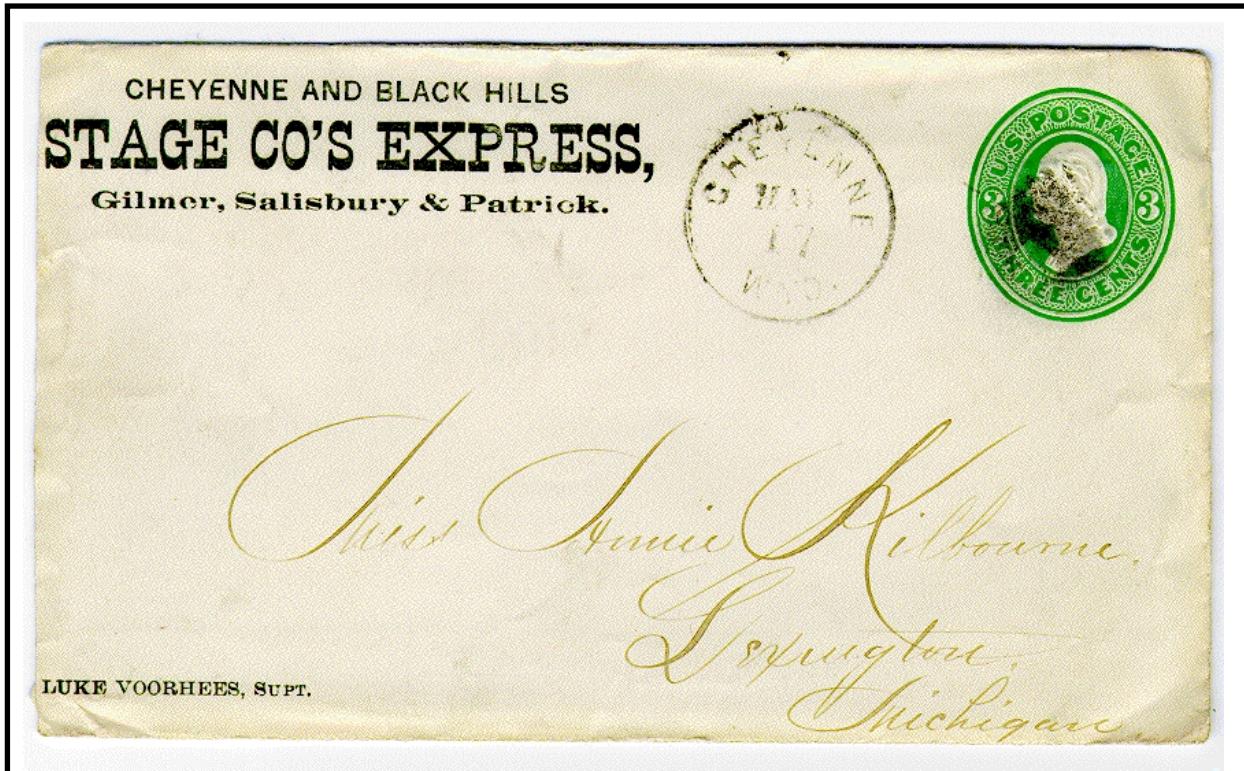
H. T. CLARKE, FORWARDING AND COMMISSION MERCHANT, wholesale dealer in Grain, Groceries, Provisions, Wagons, Mowers and Outfitting Goods, SIDNEY, NEB., CAMP CLARKE, and DEADWOOD. All orders filled and forwarded at the lowest rates of freight. Owing to the difficulty of getting mail through to and from the Black Hills, I have had printed and placed on sale at Sidney and Points in the Hills, Government Envelopes, similar to the old Pony Express, in which all mail must be enclosed to be forwarded by CLARKE'S LETTER EXPRESS to Custer City, Deadwood and other points. Price 10 cts. Letters from the East sent in care H. T. Clarke, Sidney, Neb., will go forward, and collect on delivery, 2 cts, cents.



Davenport, Iowa (Oct 6, ca1876) – Persson Type 11a imprint

One of the few known covers that entered the mails outside Nebraska





The “Cheyenne & Black Hills Stage Co’s Express” via Cheyenne, Wyoming was a competitor to Clarke’s route via Sidney, Nebraska. The former line operated until Feb, 1887, while Clarke’s lasted only until late 1877.

