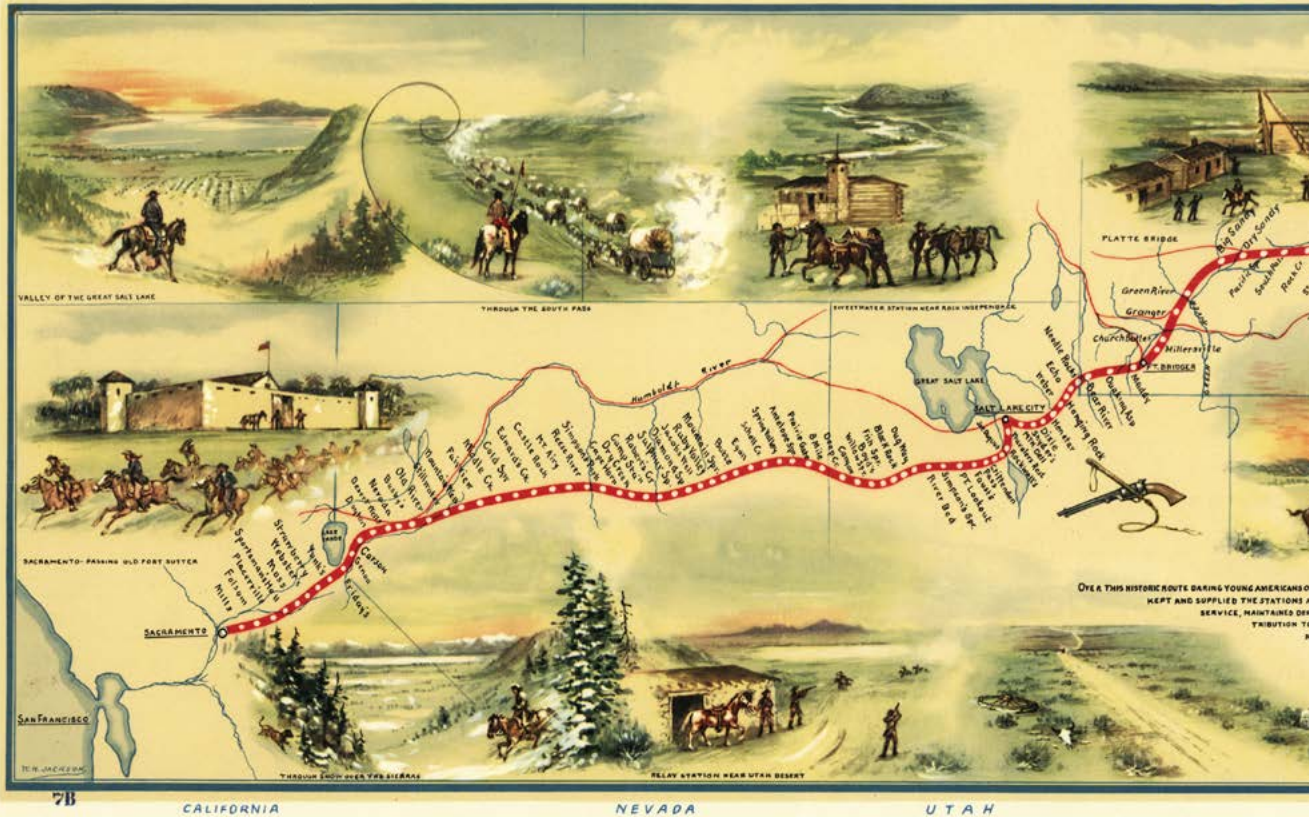


# Riding with the

Bottom: Margaret Lindmark; Top: Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division

PONY EXPRESS ROUTE



OVER THIS HISTORIC ROUTE SAVING YOUNG AMERICANS KEPT AND SUPPLIED THE STATIONS A SERVICE, MAINTAINED DER TRIBUTION TO



**—WANTED—**  
**YOUNG, SKINNY,**  
**WIRY FELLOWS**  
**NOT OVER EIGHTEEN.**  
**MUST BE EXPERT RIDERS,**  
**WILLING TO RISK**  
**DEATH DAILY.**  
**ORPHANS PREFERRED.**

© Nelly Shutterstock/HIP

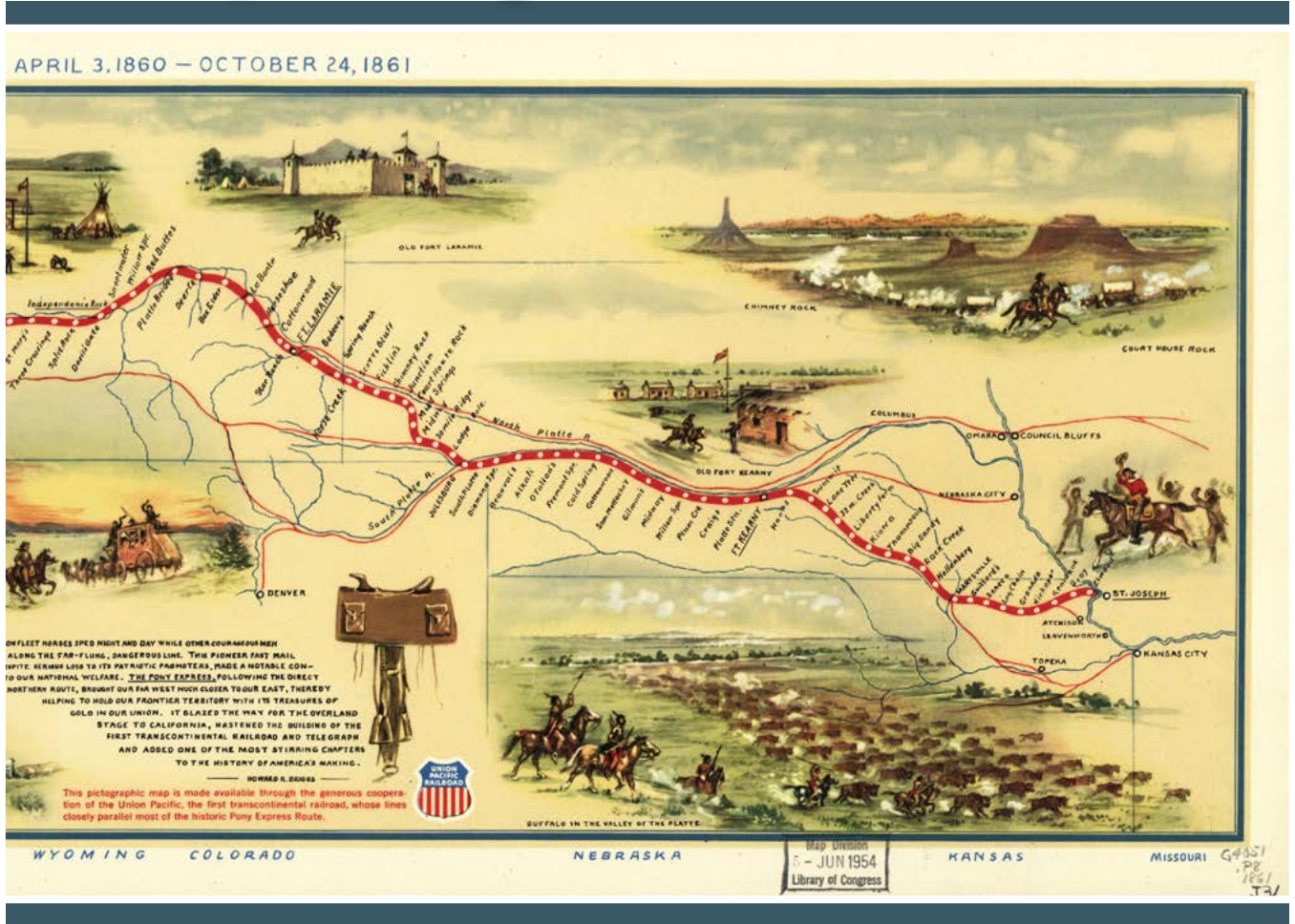
**W**ith the notice above, a Leavenworth, Kansas, company named Russell, Majors & Waddell hoped to establish a spectacular 10-day mail service from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California. That may not sound so impressive today, considering the speed of our text messages, e-mails, and cell phones. But in the mid-1800s, it took several weeks for news and information to make its way from St. Joseph, where telegraph service ended, to the West Coast.

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# Pony Express



A Map of the Pony Express route.



The Pony Express's first trip, begun on April 3, 1860, successfully delivered the mail to Sacramento in just under 10 days. After that, teenaged boys regularly made the nearly 2,000-mile trip back and forth from St. Joseph to Sacramento. They rode through blizzards and snowdrifts, over the white salt desert of Utah and the badlands of Nevada, through cloudbursts and heat waves. They fought wolves and were on the lookout for terrifying bison stampedes and Indian ambushes.

The boys traveled light, usually dressed in buckskin shirts, pants, slouch hats, and moccasins. The leather mail pouch, called a *mochila* (Spanish for "knapsack"), rested on top of a lightweight saddle. Riders were paid 100 dollars to 125 dollars per month; some got 150 dollars if the route was especially dangerous. Each rider took an oath promising not to drink liquor, fight, or use bad language.

Stations with fresh horses were spaced 10 to 15 miles apart. Riders were scheduled to take shifts of about

**Because Pony Express riders had to weigh no more than 125 pounds, teenaged boys were recruited to do the job.**

75 miles each, but sometimes there were no relief riders and they had to continue. One of the most famous riders, 15-year-old William Cody, later known as Buffalo Bill, reportedly stayed in the saddle for nearly 22 hours over 322 miles.

The Pony Express carried President Abraham Lincoln's inaugural address of March 4, 1861, to the West Coast in a record-setting time of 7 days 17 hours. Rider "Pony Bob" Haslam was responsible for one 75-mile leg of this journey, through western Nevada. He delivered the message despite being wounded by Paiute Indians. Getting Lincoln's words to the people in California was of vital importance: The Civil War was brewing and people on each side of the conflict were trying to convince California to support their cause.

During their 18 months in the saddle, the Pony Express riders lived by the motto "The mail must go through." An Indian war in the spring of 1860 interrupted service for a few

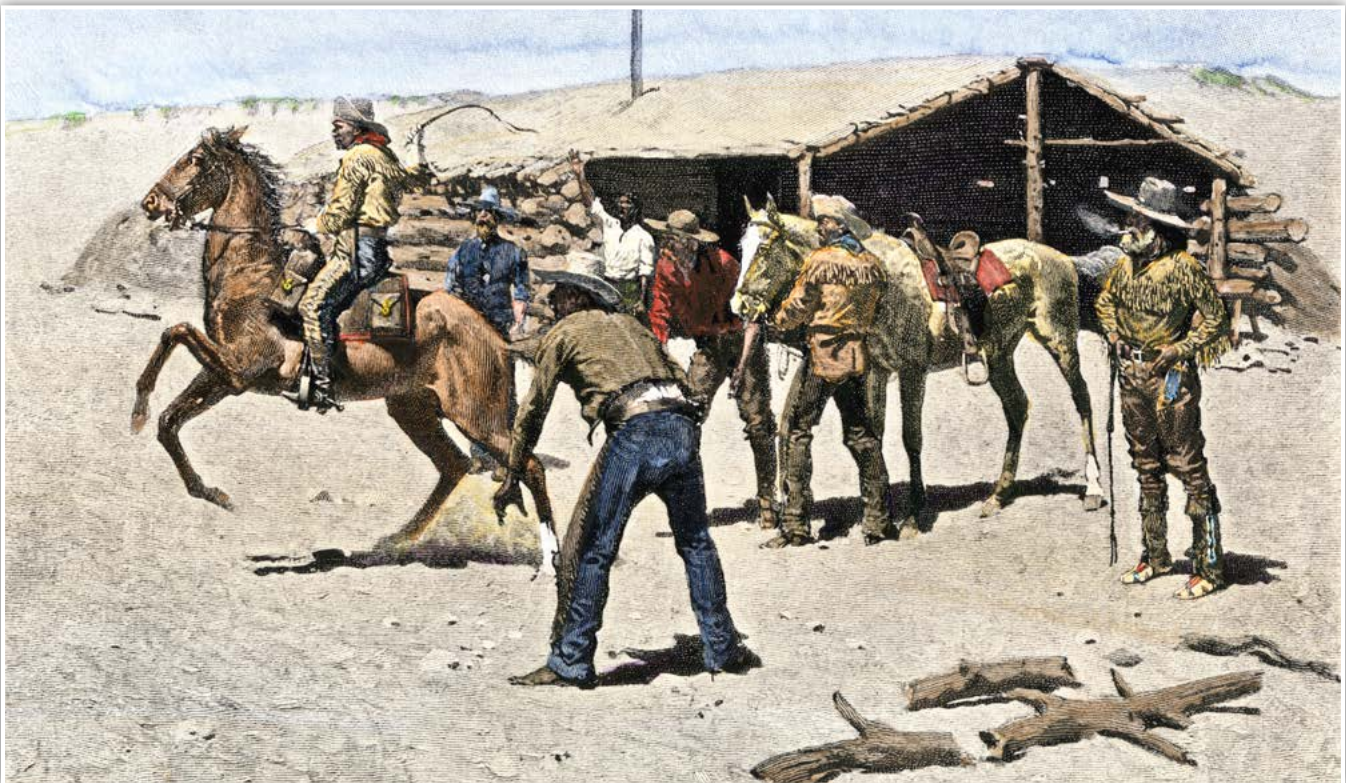
weeks, but in the end, it wasn't the Indians or the weather that stopped the Pony Express. It was the telegraph.

On May 27, 1861, a construction crew put up the first telegraph pole in Omaha, Nebraska, connecting that city with the East. As they worked their way west, another crew headed east from California. On October 24, 1861, the two crews met in Salt Lake City, Utah. They joined their wires, thus putting the Pony Express out of business. Not even the fastest rider could outrace Samuel Morse's message machine.

The Pony Express did, however, establish the benefit of timely communication between East and West. And even more important, since riders carried the mail throughout the year, it convinced Americans that a central route across the land could be traveled in winter as well as summer. Within eight years, the tracks for the first transcontinental railroad were laid, and Americans began riding the "iron horse" to points west.



**Pony Express riders changed horses at stations located about 10 to 15 miles apart along the route—approximately the longest distance a horse can go at full speed.**



Top: Margaret Lindmark; Bottom: North Wind Picture Archive

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