

## The Pony Express

In 1860, the telegraph line (from east to west) only went as far west as St. Joseph, Missouri. It was nearly 2,000 miles from St. Joseph to the west coast at Sacramento, California. It took months for messages carried by ships, wagon trains, or stagecoaches to reach California. How could mail and messages get to the west coast faster?

A relay system of horse riders, called the Pony Express, was set up. The riders would carry the mail as fast as possible. The very first rider left St. Joseph, Missouri, on April 3, 1860. Stations where the speeding riders could stop were about 10 to 15 miles apart. At certain stations, a rider could get a fresh horse. Each rider had to ride about 75 miles before the mail was passed on to the next rider. The schedule allowed eight days for a mail pouch to be carried from Missouri to California. This was much faster than carrying messages by ship, wagon train, or stagecoach.

Alexander Majors, from Kentucky, was the man who managed the Pony Express system. He used 75 horses to run the route. At first it cost \$5 to send a letter weighing 1/2 an ounce to California. Later, it cost \$1 per half ounce. The fastest Pony Express run took place in 1861 when President Lincoln was inaugurated. His inaugural speech was carried to California in 7 days and 17 hours. One of his most famous riders was Buffalo Bill Cody.

In October, 1861, the first telegraph line was connected through to California. Then messages could reach the west coast in minutes not days. Within just two days, the Pony Express service began to die from lack of business. However, its riders had given the United States a vital service for 18 months.