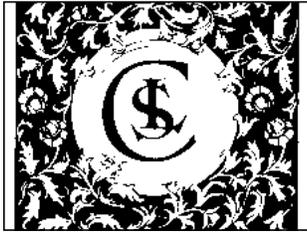


CALIFORNIA  
STATE  
LIBRARY  
FOUNDATION

Number 121  
2018

# Bulletin





# Bulletin

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The *Bulletin* is included as a membership benefit to Foundation members and those individuals contributing \$40.00 or more annually to Foundation Programs. Membership rates are:

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The Mead B. Kibbey California State Library Foundation

Fellowship Established

Katherine Weedmam-Cox Joins the Board

**Front Cover:** A Young Californio woman, poised and regal, represents a short-live and romanticized era in California History. See Donald J. Hagerty's article on the library's Maynard Dixon mural, pages 14-23.

**Back Cover:** One of the many details from Dixon's great mural, "A Pageant of Traditions." It depicts an Aztec leader.

**Illustrations and Photo Credits:** The editor extends his gratitude to Brittney Cook, Marianne Leach, Vincent Beiderbecke and Matt Bartok for their expertise in creating digital scans and photographs for this issue. All images are from the collections of the State Library's California History Section and the Sutro Library.

**Design:** Angela Tannehill, Tannehill Design | [www.angelatannehill.com](http://www.angelatannehill.com)

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# Pony Express Historian Joe Nardone's Gifts from the Trail

*By M. Patricia Morris*





Wells, Fargo & Co. issued these two 25 cent stamps for its Pony Express route between Placerville, California, and Virginia City, Nevada Territory. The route was in operation between 1862 and 1865.

This is one of three statues in Joe Nardone's donation to the State Library. It replicates a larger-than-life sculpture created by artist Tom Holland and placed in Old Sacramento, California, to honor the western stopping point for the Pony Express.

INTRODUCTION

One hundred fifty-eight years ago, on April 3, 1860 at 7:15 P.M., the first Pony Express rider mounted his horse and set out westbound from St. Joseph, Missouri, to begin the mission of this new enterprise to transport mail by the fastest means possible via a central route across America. It just happened, I scheduled an interview with Pony Express Historian Joe Nardone in the State Library's California History Room on April 4, 2018. Did we miss the auspicious date by one day, the day when the first Pony Express rider would have headed east from Sacramento?

As one who has made a quest of finding the truth about the

history of this nineteen-month period in which the Pony Express existed, Nardone set the record straight with amazing precision telling me that on April 3rd, 1860, at 3:45 p.m., the Pony Express rider in San Francisco arrives the mail, rides from that office to the river steamer, *The New World*, and comes up the river to Sacramento. The steamer gets here at 2 o'clock in the morning of April 4th. On April 4th, Hamilton (the rider) gets the mail and takes off.

There you have it, our meeting took place on April 4, 2018, the 158th anniversary of the first Pony Express rider's departure on horseback eastbound from Sacramento.



## ABOUT JOE NARDONE

Joe Nardone's study of the Pony Express began not long after his retirement in 1982.

He was looking to write about one of America's western trails or a branch of one of the trails when a National Park Service employee and friend asked him a question about accuracy of the 1,966 mile length of the Pony Express Trail from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento. It was a question that piqued his curiosity and set in motion his 36-year fascination with the "Pony." He has traveled the trail by seven different modes of transportation: horseback, airplane, hiking, 4-wheel drive, mountain bicycle, dual-sport motorcycle and recreational vehicle.<sup>1</sup> He has participated in the marking of Pony Express stations along the trail and mapped every Pony Express mile. Over the years, Joe visited, in his words, "every repository you can think

of from coast to coast. Going through their archives and reading all their newspapers in print in the 1860s." It is the California State Library, though, where most of his research has taken place. He came to the Library for its extensive materials covering 1860–1861, and in particular its California newspaper resources.

### A GIFT FOR ALL TO SEE

Unlike so many days spent in the rare book room or at a microfilm reader, Joe Nardone was not in the in the California History Section's Rare Materials Reading Room this day to conduct research, but to talk about a major gift he is making to the State Library. When complete, the donation will include statues, artifacts, books, maps, and pamphlets, all illustrative of Pony Express history.

Why did he choose the State Library as a

repository for the donation? Mr. Nardone replied that it was his relationship with former Principal Librarian for Special Collections and current Foundation Executive Director Gary Kurutz. Kurutz came down to Joe's home in Southern California, and they talked about what the Library might like to have. "Can we do this, Joe?" Gary asked. Joe said, "We'll figure out how to make it happen."

When visitors step into the California History Section's Rare Materials Read-

### EDITOR'S NOTE

*M. Patricia Morris is the Bulletin's long-time copy editor and a frequent contributor. She has specialized in interviewing and writing profiles of staff, board members, and donors to the Library's collections. To date, she has written twenty-two articles of which eleven were profiles.*

ing Room now, they will be able to see the physical objects he is presenting to the Library. They will be housed in and on two display cases. The cases are being constructed by Burnett & Sons, a Sacramento company that is a historic entity in itself, having been in business since 1869. The books, pamphlets, maps, and other ephemera will be incorporated into the State Library's collections and known as the Joe Nardone Memorial Pony Express Research Collection.

### THE THREE STATUES

Prominently on view will be three statues, all depicting Pony Express riders in the saddle, in full motion, with the intent expressed on their faces of moving the mail as fast as the horses can carry it. Pointing to the largest of the three statues, Nardone said, "That one knocked my socks off." The statue is about three feet high and weighs nearly 200 pounds. It was produced by internationally renowned sculptor Avarad T. Fairbanks. During his career, Fairbanks created more than 100 public monuments portraying historic figures and events. Four of his statues are in the U.S. Capitol building in Washington D.C.<sup>2</sup>

Bill Harrah of hotel and casino fame hired Fairbanks to sculpt two larger-than-life Pony Express statues. One is situated outside Harrah's in Stateline, Nevada. The other is at Harrah's in North Kansas City, Missouri. Nardone arranged with the Fairbanks family to create the one-half scale replica that now resides in the California State Library.

The middle-sized statue will be familiar to anyone who has spent time walking the streets of Old Sacramento. Thomas Holland, an artist who also happened to be a polo player, created the original to honor the stopping point for the Pony Express in Sacramento. Fifteen feet in height, he based the rider's clothing on a description in Mark Twain's *Roughing It*.<sup>3</sup>

Nardone purchased this replica in an antique store in Sacramento. Holland made

twenty-five of these statues. He interviewed Mr. Holland, who lived in Southern California, before he died. "A really nice guy," Nardone said. He asked the artist why the rider wasn't carrying a gun to which Holland replied, "Well, our governor who is now President Reagan, said, "The riders rode so fast, they didn't need one."

Nardone found the third and smallest of the trio in an antique store in St. Joseph. Since this statue was made by a company that specializes in bookends, it was thought to be a bookend replica. "Everyone collects something," Mr. Nardone observed. The little statue was never intended to be a bookend. This horse and rider represents a larger-than-life Pony Express statue located in the civic center of St. Joseph, Missouri. The artist, sculptor Hermon Atkins MacNeil, was commissioned to create it to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the Pony Express. It was dedicated in St. Joseph on April 20, 1940.

### AN EDUCATIONAL MOMENT

The Pony Express, though brief, still stirs excitement in the American imagination. Many myths about the venture have been repeated so often they are believed to be

true. During Joe Nardone's many years of study, he has made it a point to discern fact from fiction. Before we continue to talk about his wonderful gift, let's pause here for an educational moment.

The common belief is that Pony Express riders leaped on their steeds and galloped the 10 or 15 miles to the next station where they changed horses. Indeed all three of the young men portrayed in the statues are going, in a phrase I heard Mr. Nardone use for one of them "hell bent for leather." But did they always ride at horse-race speeds? Not according to Nardone. "They were riding maybe 4 to 5 miles an hour, maybe 7 in the daytime when they can see. At nighttime, probably 4. You only have to do 6 miles an hour to do the trip in 10 or 11 days." If they did that, they would meet the goal of the Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express Company, the parent organization of the Pony Express.

### MOCHILA & SADDLE

One of the two cases planned for the California History Room will house a life-size saddle and mochila. A mochila is the distinctive pack Pony Express riders used to carry mail. It could be easily thrown



Joe Nardone is showing the construction and uses of this replicated Pony Express saddle and mochila (Mo-Chee-La), the saddle cover made for transporting mail.