

Rare Pony Express material up for auction



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One of only three known surviving envelopes postmarked on the first day of the famous Pony Express service in 1860 is coming up for auction.

It is among a collection of historic Pony Express mail and postage stamps that will be offered in a public auction in New York City, as well as online on, December 5.

The multi-million dollar collection is owned by retired Hawaii business executive Thurston Twigg-Smith, 88, former publisher of the Honolulu Advertiser newspaper.

"This is the most important private collection of noteworthy Pony Express material ever offered in a public auction," said Scott Trepel, president of Robert A. Siegel Auction Galleries, which is running the auction.

"Each of the 63 items is literally a piece of Old West history you can hold in your hands."

The firm estimates the collection will sell for \$US2.5 million or more.

"One of the highlights is the finest of only three known surviving stamped covers [envelopes] postmarked on the first day of the legendary Pony Express service - April 3, 1860."

It is valued at \$US300,000 or more, Trepel said.

"Paid. Central Overland Pony Express Company" is printed on the envelope that also has a pre-printed 20-cent postage stamp. It is addressed to then California US Senator and former Governor, Milton Latham in Washington, DC, and is postmarked twice; April 3 in San Francisco, then 10 days later, April 13, in St Joseph, Missouri.

"There are 32 Pony Express-postmarked envelopes in the auction, along with dozens of examples of single stamps and multiple blocks of Pony Express postage issued by Wells Fargo & Co," said Trepel.

Although it operated for only 19 months from April 3, 1860, to October 26, 1861, the Pony Express is an iconic part of US western history.

Mail was carried by lone riders on horseback at full gallop between St Joseph, Missouri, and San Francisco, California, a distance of 1900 miles, over rocky terrain and through unpredictable rivers.

Riders changed horses at stations set every 75-100 miles.

Publisher of the Honolulu Advertiser from 1961 to 1993, business executive and philanthropist Twigg-Smith is a fifth generation descendant of Hawaiian missionaries. He began collecting stamps at the age of eight in 1929.

His favorite item in the collection is also the most valuable. It's one of only two known surviving Pony Express letters that originated from Hawaii, and is described by Trepel as "one of the most important covers in United States postal history".

Valued today at \$500,000 or more, it's an envelope with a rare \$4 denomination Wells Fargo Pony Express stamp and addresses written in pencil that carried documents from the US Consulate in Oahu, Hawaii, to the US Treasury Department in Washington DC in August 1861.

A half dozen postmarks, including a Pony Express mark, trace its travel from when it began its trans-continental US journey from San Francisco after arriving from Hawaii.

"It took about six months to make the trip each way when my great-great grandparents came to Hawaii as the first missionaries in 1820. So, it was a year before you got the answer to a question you sent in the mail," said Twigg-Smith.

"They tried everything they could to cut down those six months, such as sending letters via China, Tahiti, by mule across Mexico's isthmus and so on. The ponies took a big bite out of the time it took to send and receive letters."

For more information: www.SiegelAuctions.com