

100 Alexander Majors

Top 100 Americans

Alexander Majors (1814–1900) was a US businessman, who along with William Hepburn Russell and William B. Waddell founded the Pony Express, based in Kansas City, Missouri.

In about 1860, their freight firm, now known as "Russell, Majors and Waddell," formed the "Central Overland California and Pikes Peak Express Company" to get the federal contract to deliver mail between Missouri and California. It had previously been held by Butterfield Overland Mail, which delivered the mail in 25 days or more over a route that went through the South. With sectional tensions on the rise, Majors and his colleagues proposed to deliver the mail over a central route through Salt Lake City, Utah and proposed doing it in 10 days via a horse relay called the Pony Express.

Even though they succeeded in making the deliveries, they did not get the contract. They went bankrupt after the Transcontinental Telegraph opened in October 1861, as its competition eliminated the need for some mail service.

He provided rail ties for the crews of the Union Pacific Railroad working on the First Transcontinental Railroad. After the railroad was completed, he continued to haul freight to towns not yet served by the railroad.

In 1848 Alexander Majors started hauling overland freight on the Santa Fe Trail. On his first trip, he set a new time record of 92 days for the 1564-mile (2500 km) round trip. Eventually he employed 4,000 men, including a 15-year-old lad named Billy Cody, later known as Buffalo Bill. Cody became one of his most famous Pony Express riders.

In 1853 Majors was awarded contracts to haul supplies to United States Army posts along the Santa Fe Trail.

Majors helped establish the Kansas City stockyards, which became a center of shipping beef to the East Coast and Midwest.

In 1854 he teamed up with William B. Waddell and William Hepburn Russell. Majors was responsible for the freighting part of the business, Waddell was to manage the office, and Russell was to use his Washington DC contacts to acquire new contracts. Waddell chose to be a silent partner, so the firm was initially called "Majors and Russell". In the 1850s their firm Russell, Majors and Waddell and the short-lived Pony Express were major businesses, contributing to the growth of Kansas City.