



Lot 49

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**The only recorded California railroad propaganda cover to another country—
a fantastic piece of Western Americana with an impressive provenance**

ESTIMATE \$15,000-20,000

DESCRIPTION

10¢ Green, Type V (35), horizontal strip of three, tied by two bold strikes of “San Francisco Cal. Feb. 17, 1860” circular datestamp on **illustrated railroad propaganda cover to Stade, Prussia**, text above steaming locomotive has stagecoach route directive “PER OVERLAND MAIL STAGE, VIA LOS ANGELES.” and in small letters the railroad promotional slogan “In hope of the [train],” San Francisco publisher’s imprint below woodcut illustration “Published by Hutchings & Rosenfield, 146 Montgomery St.”, red “N. York Am. Pkt. Paid 7 Mar. 17” 7¢ credit datestamp—carried on the Inman’s *Glasgow* from New York on March 17, arriving in Queenstown on March 30 and Liverpool on March 31—entered Prussian mail system at Aachen with partly clear red “AACHEN [2/4?] FRANCO” framed transit datestamp, blue “Stadt 3/4” (April 3) receiving backstamp

PROVENANCE

William S. White, Percy Doane sale, 1/16/1937, lot 148

Henry C. Gibson, Sr., Ward sale, 6/14-15/1944, lot 184

C. Corwith Wagner, John A. Fox sale, 10/23/1957, lot 162, front cover illustration, to “R.A.”

J. David Baker, Siegel Auction Galleries, 4/4/1978, Sale 526, lot 43

Louis Grunin, Christie’s Robson Lowe sale, Part One, 3/25/1987, lot 118

Private collector, Siegel Auction Galleries, 10/29/1996, Sale 784, lot 2095

“Sevenoaks” collection, Siegel Auction Galleries, 11/15/2000, Sale 831, lot 2111, to William H. Gross

CENSUS, LITERATURE AND EXHIBITION REFERENCES

Jesse L. Coburn, *Letters of Gold*, p. 136

CERTIFICATION

The Philatelic Foundation (1987)

CONDITION NOTES

Very Fine strip and cover; small piece of backflap missing and very slightly reduced at top

HISTORY AND COMMENTARY

Transportation, Politics and the Pacific Railroad

Prior to the transcontinental railroad’s completion in May 1869, the only means to transport people, material and mail between the West Coast and the other side of the Sierras and Rocky Mountains was by stagecoach on land or by steamship on water. During the 1850s and 1860s, the trips averaged three to four weeks, and perilous conditions existed due to weather, rough or muddy terrain, and the threat of Indian attacks on the stage route.

As early as 1845, bills were submitted to Congress to seek government support for a “Pacific” railroad. The transcontinental railroad was part of the Republican Party’s platform in 1856, and both parties supported the concept in the 1860 election. To rally public and political support for the railroad, different types of envelopes were printed with the image of a train—on this one, the locomotive is steaming past a town and a slogan expresses “hope” for the railroad. These envelopes still served a practical purpose of directing the letter to go by the overland mail stage, but they carried a message to legislators back home: build the railroad!

Several designs are known, all rare, but almost every railroad propaganda cover is addressed to a place within the United States. The one exception known to collectors is the cover to Germany offered here. Instead of the usual single 10¢ stamp for the over-3,000 miles rate, it has a strip of three paying the 30¢ rate to Germany via Prussian Closed Mail. The mail was first carried by steamer to Great Britain, and the closed mail bag was forwarded to Aachen, where it entered the Prussian mail system. The United States credited the Prussian postal authorities 7¢ for their part.

One wonders what the German addressee in Stade thought when this “Choo Choo” envelope was delivered. Back then it carried a letter from the Wild West, which was probably reason enough to save it for future generations. And the list of collectors who have prized this cover as a unique piece of Western Americana is long and impressive, including White, Gibson, Wagner, Baker and Grunin—and, of course, Mr. Gross, who bought it in the 2000 Siegel sale of the “Sevenoaks” 1857-1868 Issue collection. ■