

A brief history of the canadian pacific railway history essay



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The Railways are very important part of Canada's history and a part of transportation. " For more than a century, CP rail was called the Canadian Pacific Railway, and it remains today the railroad that helped to settle the Canadian West in the Second half of the last Century" (Thomas York 129). The CP was not only built to provide transportation, but it was also built to get British Columbia united with Canada. It also helped many Chinese immigrants to come to Canada and had a strong impact on the political and economic connection between west to east of Canada. It is beyond doubt that the Canadian Pacific Railway was really the one that had Canada united as a country.

Chinese workers had an important contribution to the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway in British Columbia. Andrew Onderdonk, an American who was hired for construction contractor for Canadian Pacific Railway in British Columbia, signed agreement with Chinese contractors in China's Guangdong province. Five thousand labourers were sent from China by ship during these contracts and over seven thousand were employed from California. Between 1881 and 1884 there were 17000 Chinese labourers working on Canadian Pacific Railway. Chinese workers got paid "\$1. 00 a day, and from this \$1. 00 the workers had to still pay for their food and their camping and cooking gear, [while] white workers did not have to pay for these things even though they were paid more money \$1. 50-\$2. 50 per day"(Library and Archives Canada). The Chinese workers had the most dangerous jobs from others, as they had to break off granite and planted explosives that were used to blow up tunnels. While working on the railway, many died due to accidents, fires and dynamite blasts. The Chinese workers

lived in tents, but these tents were unsafe as they did not provide protection from falling rocks. When the Canadian Pacific Railway completed in 1885, the Chinese workers needed to find new jobs. Several workers went back to China, while some found a new job as gardeners, cooks and servants. The Chinese moved to east of Canada and settled there, opening restaurants and laundries. When the railway finished, the government passed The Chinese Immigration Act of 1885 charging a Head Tax of \$50 to any Chinese coming to Canada. This act was meant to stop Chinese immigration to Canada, but the 1885 act failed and the government passed The Chinese Immigration Act of 1900 to increase the tax to \$100 and The Chinese Immigration Act of 1903 to increase the tax to \$500. An estimated of \$23 million was collected from 1885 and 1923 from the head tax. During this period, the Chinese in Canada lived a bachelor society as families in China would not pay this much money to send their daughters to Canada. After Canada entered World War II, the Chinese communities contributed to Canada's war efforts and this brought "independent Chinese immigrants in Canada. . . after Canada eliminated race and the " place of origin" section from its immigration policy in 1967"(History of Chinese Immigration to Canada, Wikipedia. org). Chinese suffered extreme intolerance and abuse, but thanks to their work of the Trans-Canada railway, Chinese communities developed across the Canada. When the railway was building, many manufacturer began to see this railway had big economic possible.

The economic impact caused by the construction of a transcontinental railway was very big. The building of the CPR across the Canada gave Manitoba a wheat economy. " In the late 1890s, the prospects for

development brightened as world prices rose, transport costs fell, methods of dry land farming improved, and more appropriate varieties of wheat became available" (The Canadian Encyclopedia © 2010 Historica-Dominion, Economic History). British Columbia's economy changed after the Confederation with Canada and due to construction of CPR more urbanization occurred. Important activities started in south such as fisheries, silver, coal and metal mining. After the CPR was built, it realized that passengers on the railway needed place to stop and rest. The president of the CPR William Van Horne planned to build three hotels. " The hotels, Mount Stephen in Field, BC, Glacier House in Rogers Pass, BC and Fraser Canyon House in North Bend, BC were very modest, but they paved the way for the construction of other hotels along CPR's rail line"(2006 Canadian Pacific Railway 11). The Railway was also a good help for Canada during World War II, it helped to moved 86 million passenger and many soldiers and sailors. CPR also helped Canada to host two important meetings in Quebec City during 1943 and 1944 called the Quebec Conferences. It was where the Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, United States President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met at first Quebec Conference. There were political reasons behind building the CPR and joined British Columbia to Canada. Canada wanted to have British Columbia joined Canada to have west to east connection. This would have easy access of trading between west and east and transferring soldiers from one end to another. While many persons took personal advantage of the construction of the Railway, some took bribery and scandal began to happen between political parties. The merchants of

British Columbia and the businessmen of Ontario and Quebec were the ones with most profit from the construction of the CPR due to economic boost.

Canada never remained the same after first transcontinental railroad. The CPR began a strong promotion to bring immigrants to Canada. The CP Railway sold a land to immigrants at a price of \$2. 50 an acre and up. The railways also built business cars for CPR manager, so they could travel in comfort. The managers and visitors not only had a comfort but they dined in high style. When the visitors had free time they could relax in comfortable chairs and enjoy the Canada's beautiful landscape. The Company of the CPR grew and expanded its business apart from the railway. The Companies main business were " railway; ships; hotels; mines, minerals and manufacturing; oil and gas exploration; airlines; telecommunications; trucking; and real estate"(2006 Canadian Pacific Railway 18). The Canadian Pacific Railway is Canada's second largest company with employees of 100, 000 or more. Canada is buying more products from China and Japan such as cars and toys and then CPR delivers these products to stores in North America. The builders of the CPR knew that not only were they creating a nation, but also a profit for the company of CPR.

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