

Discovery of gold in america

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The discovery of gold in California sparked a massive emigration across the continent to the Pacific coast by Americans searching for wealth. This massive migration of people brought Jefferson's dream of a continental American empire to reality, and began to establish the United States as the dominant country in North America. This massive migration also prompted the need to bridge the nation for the purpose of making the trip from one coast to another easier.

This resulting need to bridge the nation might be the greatest contribution of the gold rush to the history of the United States. On January 24th, 1848, James Marshall discovered what he believed to be Gold dust in the bed of a creek right outside his mill. He brought this sample of the shiny material up to Ft. Sutter in Sacramento, where it was deemed indeed to be gold, and thus the migration of massive amounts of people we call the gold rush began. In two years after the discovery of gold, the population of California was 90. 000 people.

At the time of the discovery California was relatively uninhabited by Americans. The United States had finally realized its dream of a country reaching from sea to shining sea, but now that the lands were there, the United States had to figure out how to get its people to settle these lands so they would actually be worth having. It is great for a country to have a lot of land, but if they remain uninhabited and underdeveloped then the land really isn't worth much. The " gold rush" consisted of many prospectors seeking to find their fortunes in the mines of California.

The emigration of so many Americans to the very western boundary of the country was exactly what the Government needed for the lands it just purchased to be seen as a wise investment. In the two years since the discovery of gold the population of California ballooned to 90 thousand people, most of which were prospectors, and others trying to get rich quick off the discovery of gold. By 1854, the population reached an even more impressive 300 thousand people. Many people moved out west to escape the cities of the east and set off on their own, be free.

The migration into these uninhabited lands increased the need for transportation like roads, railroads, and canals as well as the opportunities for work and another incentive for people to move out of the cities where there was a large incidence of unemployment. With the discovery of gold and the massive migration of emigrants westward, came the need to be able to more quickly traverse the continent for both communication, and transportation. The answer to this need was the transcontinental railroad.

By the middle of the 1850's, the need for a transcontinental railroad was universally accepted and acknowledged. Before now, the best way to get from the east coast to the west coast was through the Isthmus of Panama. Between 1848 and 1869, the completion of this railroad, 375 thousand people crossed Panama on their way to California and the gold, and another 225 thousand crossed the isthmus in the other direction. Along with this massive movement of people came great wealth crossing the isthmus, creating even more of a call for the development and creation of a railroad.

This crossing of Panama was very hazardous to the health of the people who crossed it. Cholera, among other deadly diseases was very prevalent among the travelers and often took many lives. The increased traffic going to the west coast along with the hazardous conditions of the next best available routes led to the inception of the idea of building a transcontinental railroad. By 1850 there were 9, 021 miles of functioning track in the United States, but nothing that connected the east coast and the west coast.

During the 1850's, an average of 2, 160 miles of new track was laid every year. With the increase in the formation of functioning track throughout the 1850's, the development of locomotives that are more powerful and more stable cars permitted engineering feats that seemed impossible a decade earlier. Railroad fever clearly had the nation in its grips and it was just a matter of time before a railroad that crossed the continent would be built. A New York businessman, Asa Whitney, was the first to propose the idea of a transcontinental railroad in 1845.

He proposed a route along the northern border we share with Canada. Before the gold rush, he was largely ignored, but afterwards he was taken seriously, and by 1853 it was realized that one was needed and that huge government subsidies would be needed to build it. Upon this realization of the need for a transcontinental railroad came the realization that whichever eastern city was the head of the railroad would become immensely wealthier, and so began a major struggle between the cities of the east to obtain the rights to be the eastern hub.

The amendment to the Army appropriations act allowed a quarter of a million dollars for the railroad to be completed in ten months, and listed five possible routes that it could take. The Northern Route, from St. Paul to Seattle, The council Bluffs to San Francisco route, the Central route, between the 38th and 39th parallels from the arkansas river to San Francisco, The route from Fort Smith along the Arkansas River to Los Angelos, and the southern route from fulton on the red River to san Diego. Diferent people would benefit from each of these routes and there was much fighting over whivh would be the ultimate route.

Once the south ceceded from the union the southern route was no longer considered as an option. An engineer named Theodore Judah went out and surveyed his own route of crossing the nation, and in 1857, he published hi Practical Plan for Building the Pacific Railroad. He went on to send a copy to the president and every member of congress, and billed it as the first genuinely " practical plan" for traversing the continent. The California state legislature adopted a memorial on the benefits of a transcontinental railroad and offered it to Judah to personally deliver to congress.

While he was selling the importance of a transcontinental railroad to Congress, he was also making plans in California to take advantage of any decision Congress makes to accept his crazy idea. He went around the state trying to convince people to by stock in his railroad company, The Central Pacific, as he was sure that Congress would pass the Curtis Act that mandated the formation of two railroads competing with each other from either end of the route and eventually meeting in the middle.

He finally sold his theory to four men, the " Big Four" as they would become known that railroads to the mining towns of California from the east coast was amoneymaker, and that if they would buy stock in his railroad company they would be able to reap the profits. The big four, or Collis Huntington, Mark Hopkins, Leland Stanford, and Charles Crocker, decided to buy into Judah's idea. Them, along with Judah, and a Nevada City mineowner named Charles Marsh decided to divide equally among themselves the cost of a full-scale survey of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, as well as buy enough stock in the company to allow its permit incorporation.

This group of visionaries started what became known as the Central Pacific Railroad Co. , which would eventually become the railroad company that built the transcontinental railroad from the west east. Due to his efforts, Judah convinced Congress to pass the Pacific Railroad Act on June 20th 1862, calling for the creation of two competing railroad companies to start at opposite ends of the route and meet in the middle. The two companies created were the Central Pacific Railroad Co. , and the Union Pacific Railroad Co.

Since the Central Pacific Railroad Co. was already a privately owned company it wasn't as heavily regulated as the Union Pacific Railroad Co. was, which was a government formed company whose specific purpose was to build the eastern leg of the railroad. The accepted route of the railroad was from Omaha, Nebraska in the East, to the Bay area in the west. The federal government granted the two companies aid in the way of United States 6%

bonds that had to be paid back with interest beginning 30 years after the completion of the railroad.

Yet, due to the Civil War that was raging at this time, the bonds held little confidence in the market and thus never sold at par, thus depreciating the aid from the very beginning. The government also awarded the companies a right-of-way extending two hundred feet on either side of the tracks, and five alternate square miles of public land on either side of the line, or 6,400 acres per mile of track. Both Companies were also to give priority to the transportation of government mails, troops, and supplies on the line.

The Union Pacific was obligated to build a hundred miles in the first 2 years and another hundred miles each succeeding year thereafter. The Central Pacific, due to the mountainous terrain was only obligated to build half as much as the Union Pacific over the same prescribed amount of time. The act also specified that the two companies would be confiscated if the railroad were not completed by July 1, 1874. The construction of the railroad and the subsequent telegraph line that went up along side it, cost the government nothing as it was only loaning its credit and not its money.

The two companies broke ground in 1863, the Union Pacific working westward from Omaha, Nebraska, and the Central Pacific from Sacramento California. The building of the track proved to be extremely difficult and arduous and provided much headache for everyone involved. The Central Pacific ran the laying of the track much like a military operation, as it was extremely organized. Due to the Civil War and the mines of the west, there was a huge labor shortage in the country. To accommodate this they had to

hire many immigrant workers, especially Chinese immigrants, to lay the track.

Getting supplies to the Central Pacific also proved to be a very difficult task, as they had to be shipped from the east to San Francisco, and then hurried into the mountains, which wasn't an easy journey. This process was very time consuming and delayed much building of the track. The company was very efficient in the beginning, making extraordinary progress through the flatlands, but upon reaching the mountains ran into most of the hardships in the building. The mountains proved to be unforgiving in the company's efforts to bridge the nation.

Cold winters with extraordinary snows slowed the construction almost to a standstill several times. Many workers died of the extreme conditions of the mountains, making progress slower still. The mountains also provided the arena for some of the most amazing feats of engineering. From blowing tunnels through the mountain, or creating a trestle over a gorge the engineering advances made in during this endeavor have lasted until now and made the building of other railroads possible. In the first three years of building, the company only laid 40 miles of track, well behind the pace mandated by the railroad act.

Over the same time, the Union Pacific wasn't doing much better as it was also only able to lay 40 miles of track itself. While the terrain wasn't as rough as that of the west, the same problems of management and labor prevailed in the east also. It wasn't until two brothers took over the actual building of the track and thusly invented what we today would consider modern

management techniques. They led by example and do anything they asked of their workers. They did much of the labor themselves and were always the ones in the front of construction.

The Union Pacific also had cars carrying anything, and everything the workers could need, it was considered a town on wheels, and consisted of such things as a sleeping quarters, and cars that served meals. The workers slept, ate, and lived on these trains, as they worked a full 12 hours a day. All the supplies for the endeavor were carried on this " city on wheels," and made the construction that much more efficient. The construction process for both companies was very costly in terms of human life.

Many accidents occurred, and the threat from the Indians was always a constant fear of the workers. By the end of 1867, the Union Pacific had laid 300 miles of track, while the Central had laid less than 80 miles. By the spring of 1869 the two railroads were racing towards each other and they eventually began to build track side by side one another going in opposite directions. It was then that they realized the dream had been accomplished and that they had to be joined. The designated meeting place of the two railroads was determined to be Promontory Point, Utah.

On May 10, 1869, two trains converged on Promontory Point, Stanford on a train called Jupiter from the west and Durant on a run of the mill train labeled Engine 119 from the east. The heads of the two companies drove in 4 spikes into the final set of rails, two gold, one silver, and one that was a mixture between gold, silver, and iron. The work was completed in six years, a whole four years of schedule resulting in a reward of 21 million acres. The

completion of the railroad was the final act in creating this great nation of ours.

Many people went west 1849 looking for a quick and easy way to obtain a great amount of wealth. Many failed and never realized their dream, but because of their migration, the nation realized the need to bridge the nation and the country as a whole became wealthier. The constructing of the railroad was probably the single greatest achievement of the mid 1800's, and the most significant thing to come out of the gold rush. Because of the railroad the nations interior began to open up to settlement and communications between the two coasts became easier.