

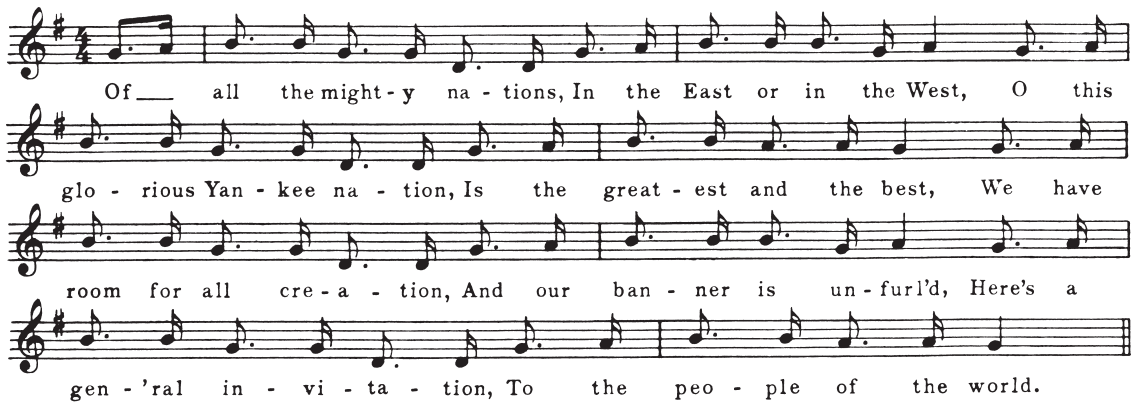
# PART SEVEN

## Settlers Win the Central Plains

Chapter 18: The Path of Shining Rails

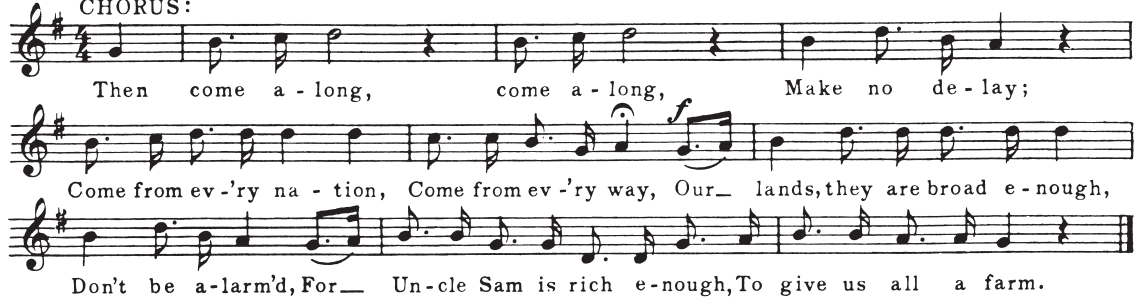
Chapter 19: Homesteaders Invade the Great Plains

# Uncle Sam's Farm



Of all the might-y na - tions, In the East or in the West, O this  
glo - rious Yan - kee na - tion, Is the great - est and the best, We have  
room for all cre - a - tion, And our ban - ner is un - furl'd, Here's a  
gen - 'ral in - vi - ta - tion, To the peo - ple of the world.

## CHORUS:



Then come a - long, come a - long, Make no de - lay;  
Come from ev - 'ry na - tion, Come from ev - 'ry way, Our lands, they are broad e - nough,  
Don't be a - larm'd, For Un - cle Sam is rich e - nough, To give us all a farm.

St. Lawrence marks our Northern line  
As fast her waters flow;  
And the Rio Grande our Southern bound,  
Way down to Mexico.  
From the great Atlantic Ocean,  
Where the sun begins to dawn,  
Leap across the Rocky Mountains,  
Far away to Oregon.

While the South shall raise the cotton,  
And the West the corn and pork,  
New England manufactures,  
Shall do up the finer work;  
For the deep and flowing waterfalls,  
That course along our hills,  
Are just the thing for washing sheep,  
And driving cotton mills.

Our fathers gave us liberty,  
But little did they dream,  
The grand results that pour along,  
This mighty age of steam;  
For our mountains, lakes and rivers,  
Are all a blaze of fire,  
And we send our news by lightning,  
On the telegraphic wires.

Yes! We're bound to beat the nations,  
For our motto's, "Go ahead."  
And we'll tell the foreign paupers,  
That our people are well fed;  
For the nations must remember,  
Uncle Sam is not a fool,  
For the people do the voting,  
And the children go to school.

## Chapter 18

# The Path of Shining Rails

### NEED FOR A CONTINENTAL RAILROAD

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR between the northern and southern states had convinced the Government that a railroad across the continent was an urgent necessity. It could not be delayed. It was a matter of national defense.

The first great westward migration to Oregon and California did not settle the plains area. The United States stretched west to the Pacific, with little means of defending the west coast from outside attack. The only route open for heavy military equipment and large numbers of troops was by way of Cape Horn, a voyage of 18,000 miles. Any naval power at war with the United States could easily close this water route. On a continental railroad within the country, soldiers and supplies could be shipped if an enemy threatened to invade the Pacific coast. Important mail could be transported by rail faster and cheaper than by stagecoach and pony express.

Also, such a railroad would increase the possibilities of trade with Asia where cheap labor supplied silk, tea, spices, and other luxuries for the people of the

United States. The teeming millions of the Orient wanted hardware, engines, and machinery from our eastern factories. The continental railroad would be a link in the route to India, sought in vain by Columbus, Cabot, and Cartier.

With a rail line to carry grain and cattle to eastern markets, settlers would move into that vast territory lying between the Missouri River and the Sierra Nevada Mountains. A great agricultural empire would grow up on the western prairie. When people began to talk about a railroad all the way to the Pacific coast, their imaginations ran wild with excitement.

Furthermore, there were facts and figures to measure the value of such a railroad to the mining industry. In fourteen years the mines of the Pacific region had added millions to the treasury of the world. Indeed this horde of gold and silver helped to finance the War Between the States and was paying a share of the national debt. By 1862 nearly everyone realized that the war would be long, bloody, and costly. The Government needed to encourage the mining industry. Why did the miners want a continental railroad?

In the camps, living expenses were so high that only the best grade ores were worth

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND GRENVILLE  
M. DODGE, COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA, 1859

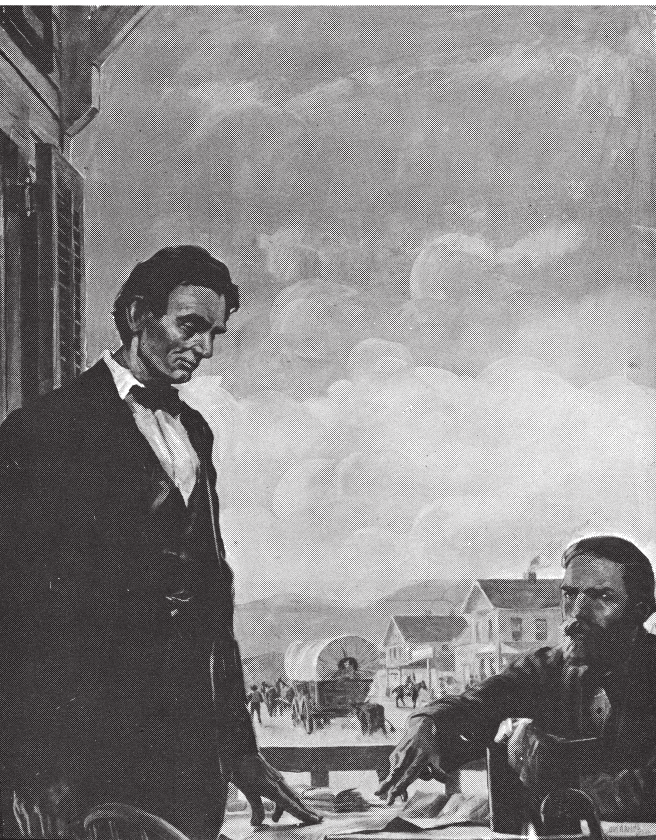
On a warm August day, Lincoln arrived in Council Bluffs from St. Joseph, Missouri after a 200 mile trip in a steamboat up the Missouri River. He came to look over land on which a friend had asked him to loan money. There he found two families, old neighbors from Illinois, who called him Abe. One took him sightseeing to a bluff where he could get a good view of the river and the surrounding country. Today, a granite monument marks the spot where they stood.

In the hotel where he stayed, he met a young engineer from Massachusetts, Grenville M. Dodge, who had gone west to survey lands for railroad companies. Lincoln and the engineer talked about the best route for a rail line to the Pacific. Dodge wrote about the meeting:

After dinner, while I was sitting on the stoop of the Pacific House, Mr. Lincoln came and sat beside me, and in his kindly way and manner was soon drawing from me all I knew of the country west and the result of my surveys.

A few years later, while Dodge was an army officer fighting under Grant in the Mississippi Campaign, President Lincoln signed the bill for a railroad to start west from Council Bluffs. He did not live to see his dream come true – to travel on that line – but General Dodge returned from the war to build the Union Pacific Railroad.

*Union Pacific Railroad*



working. Food and machinery and sometimes water, had to be carried into remote places on the backs of little burros. With every new “strike” prices soared upward as crowds swarmed into the new camp. In 1849 emigrants who bought eggs for 2½ cents a dozen and chickens for ten cents each from Iowa farmers paid \$1 for an egg and \$10 for a chicken in Sacramento. In San Francisco, with only ships to bring in food, a meal might cost eight dollars, according to a menu from the Ward House, a well-known eating place in the goldrush days.

With a railroad to bring in supplies, living and operating expenses would be lower. This would mean that mines of lower grade ore would be profitable to work. There would be more jobs and more men would come to seek work in the mines. They would bring their families. Towns would grow up along the railroad line and around the mines. Homes, stores, schools, and churches would be built. Farmers and ranchers would settle on the land when towns provided a market for their grain, vegetables, fruit, eggs, butter, milk, and meat. In time factories would be built to make what the people needed, wanted, and had the money to buy. The vast new territory on the Pacific would be safe from enemies with Americans living in it and prepared to defend it.

In country stores, at the crossroads, and in the halls of Congress in Washington, men talked of a path of shining rails from the Atlantic to the Pacific. A continental railroad became the dream of a nation. The Railroad Act of 1862 was passed by Congress. It reads as follows:

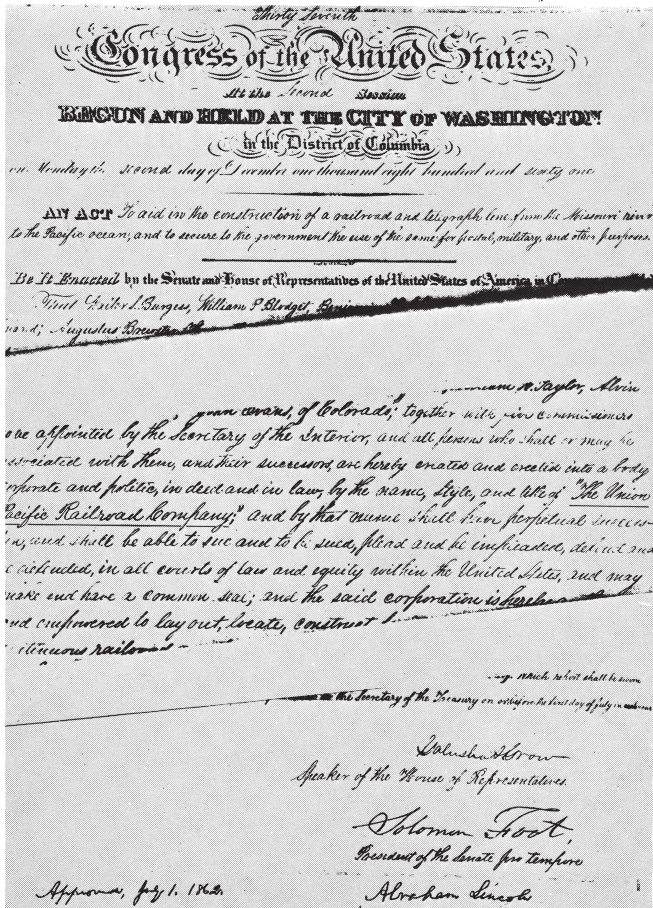
An Act: TO AID IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A RAILROAD AND TELEGRAPH LINE FROM THE MISSOURI RIVER TO THE PACIFIC

OCEAN, AND TO SECURE TO THE GOVERNMENT THE USE OF SAME FOR POSTAL, MILITARY, AND OTHER PURPOSES.

In this Act Congress gave authority to two corporations to build this line. One was the Union Pacific Railroad Company, starting west from Council Bluffs, Iowa and laying tracks, "between the south margin of the valley of the Platte River, in the territory of Nebraska." The other was the Central Pacific Railroad Company of California, authorized "to construct a railroad and telegraph line from the Pacific Coast at or near San Francisco, or the navigable waters of the Sacramento River, to the eastern boundary of California, —

COPY OF SIGNATURES ON THE RAILROAD ACT SIGNED INTO LAW July 1, 1862

Union Pacific Railroad



and to meet and connect with the first mentioned railroad and telegraph line."

The War Between the States had hastened the passage of the bill for a continental railroad by removing the southern congressmen who had insisted that the line pass through slaveholding states. The actual construction of the railroads was not started until after the war ended, except for a small beginning made by the Central Pacific heading eastward from Sacramento. In the summer of 1865 the Union Pacific started to build westward from Council Bluffs. When and where would the two lines meet?

PROBLEMS FOR THE RAILROAD BUILDERS

THE FIRST PROBLEM was money. That had to be borrowed by selling bonds to the public. To the average American of that day, wealth was measured in acres of land. To encourage the sale of the railroad bonds and provide cash to purchase materials and to pay wages, this Act of 1862 granted 6400 acres of land to each company for each mile of completed road. Still men were wary of investing their money in to send an iron horse snorting across the prairie. The sale was slow. Two years later the land grant was almost doubled. The two companies were allowed the timber on this land but were not given the mineral rights. This land allotment, 12,000 acres per mile of track, was granted "upon condition that said companies (Union Pacific and Central Pacific) shall keep said railroad and telegraph line in repair and use, and shall at all times, transmit dispatches over said telegraph line; and transport mails, troops,

and munitions of war, supplies and public stores upon said railroad for the Government; and that the Government shall at all times have the preference in the use of the same for all the purposes aforesaid, — at fair and reasonable prices, not to exceed the amounts paid by private parties for the same kind of service.”

Materials presented a problem to the Union Pacific. West of the Missouri River there were few trees except cottonwoods and willows along the streams. Most of the ties for the Union Pacific came from Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. Some were hauled overland by mules and oxen at a carrying charge of \$2.75 per tie. It cost \$135 per ton to deliver rails from Pennsylvania mills, when shipped by train to St. Louis and thence by steamboat to Omaha. Most of the rails, timber, cars, and engines for the Union Pacific went by boat down the Ohio to St. Louis and up the Missouri River to Omaha.

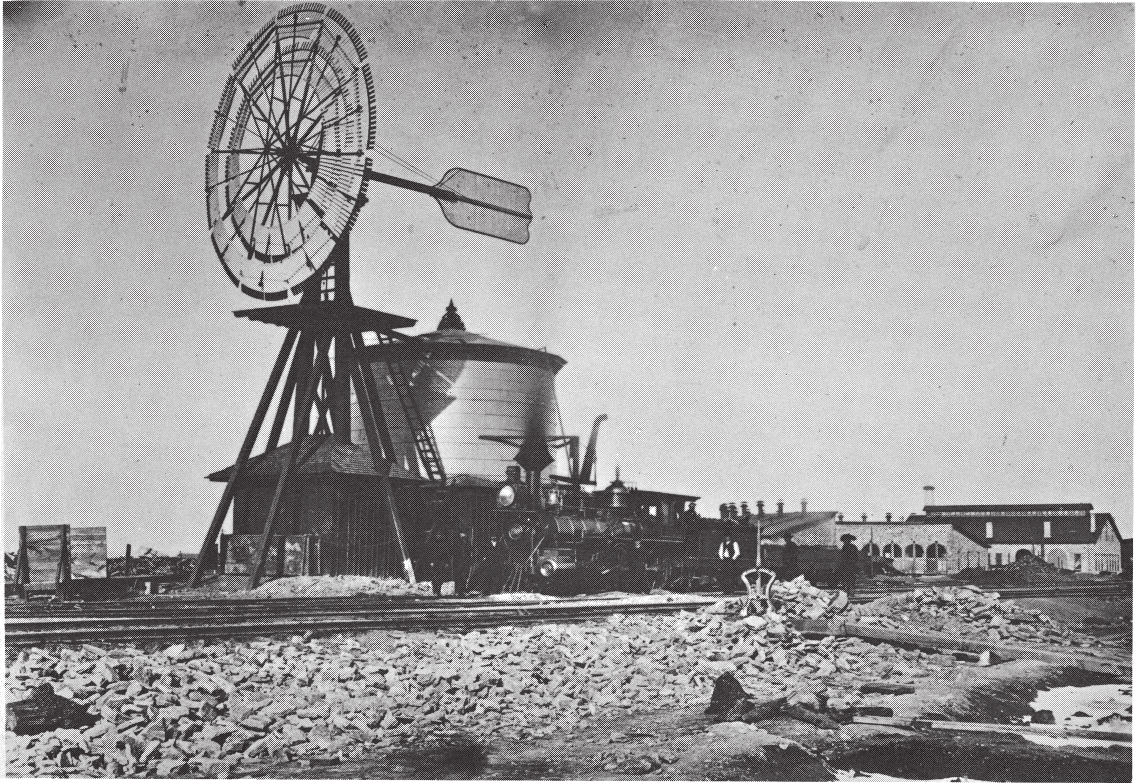
A boom struck the little river village of Omaha after the first rail was laid in July of 1865. Supplies were costly. Second-hand shovels cost \$10 and were scarce at that price. Fuel for the wood-burning engines cost \$100 a cord; grain for the horses and mules, \$7 a bushel; and wild hay, cut from the river bottoms, \$34 a ton. When the rail lines were completed between shipping points, supplies became more plentiful and cheaper.

On the open prairie food was an important item. The first continental railroad was built by hand labor. Such hard work, out-of-doors in all kinds of weather, created large appetites among the Irish immigrants who laid the rails and tamped the ties. To furnish meat for one construction crew, the Union Pacific hired the expert rifle shot, William F. Cody, at

\$500 a month. Early each morning “Buffalo Bill” rode away from camp to shoot the ten or twelve bison needed for one day’s meat supply. When the line was completed, Cody moved his family west and settled on a ranch in Nebraska, where his cattle grazed on the old buffalo range.

Military officers were employed to boss the laboring crews. They used army methods, with each worker going at top speed. When the ties were in place, horses pulled a car of rails to the end of the track. At a signal from the foreman five men on each side seized a rail. “Down!”, the foreman shouted, and two rails hit the ties. Every fifteen seconds nine yards of the Union Pacific were finished.

The crew laid about six miles of track in a day. It was not unusual for the men to get up the next morning and find that Indians had come during the night and torn out their work. In an effort to keep on good terms with the red men, the crews invited them to ride on the “iron horse.” The Indians were fed and given trinkets when they visited the construction camps. Wise men among the Indians knew that the puffing engine would haul more white men to shoot more buffalo. More Indians would be cold and hungry, without tepees for shelter and meat for food. Every workman, if not guarded by soldiers, took both shovel and rifle to the job. In case of Indian attack he put down his shovel and picked up his rifle. Much of the time the construction crews were guarded by soldiers under the command of General William T. Sherman, who had led the march to the sea through Georgia. Finally in 1868 the Government made a treaty with the Indians to give them lands where no white man could go, in exchange for the railroad lands. This treaty, like others, did not last long. The plains



*Union Pacific Railroad*

### LARAMIE, WYOMING IN EARLY DAYS

Laramie was founded in 1868 when the Union Pacific chose the site for a supply center. This photograph shows the shops constructed of rocks picked up nearby; a water tank; a windmill that cost \$10,000; and a little steam engine with a big smokestack.

West of Laramie, the Union Pacific Company faced the task of building the railroad over the Continental Divide at an altitude of 8,000 feet. This pass was named for General William T. Sherman who commanded the soldiers sent to guard the line while under construction.

tribes had watched the trains of covered wagons cross enroute to the Pacific. Would this iron monster, whose sides no arrow could pierce, bring another westward migration to plow the buffalo range? The Indians knew the answer and fought to stop the white man from coming.

The problems of the Central Pacific, building east, were different. The land grant of 12,000 acres per mile gave this company forests with fine timber. In

1868 near the present site of Truckee, twenty-four sawmills were kept busy furnishing ties for tracks, timber for trestles, and lumber for snowsheds. Rails, engines, and other supplies came by boat around Cape Horn. Thousands of Chinese immigrants poured into San Francisco to work on the railroad. The California Indians were docile and gave little trouble to the railroad builders. The problems of the Central Pacific

were rolled into one word – MOUNTAINS.

Not many miles from Sacramento, the starting point of the Central Pacific, the Sierras begin to rise and form a barrier nearly 150 miles wide. Many people thought a railroad could not possibly be built through these mountains. They proposed a line to the foothills only, with a wagon road to transport freight and passengers over the range. The Central Pacific was built through the mountains and in record time. With glycerine and dynamite, roadbeds were blasted from the walls of the cliffs; trestles were erected to bridge the canyons; and tunnels were bored through peaks of solid rock. With plenty of timber, a seaport for supplies, cheap Chinese labor and friendly natives, the Central Pacific Railroad Company

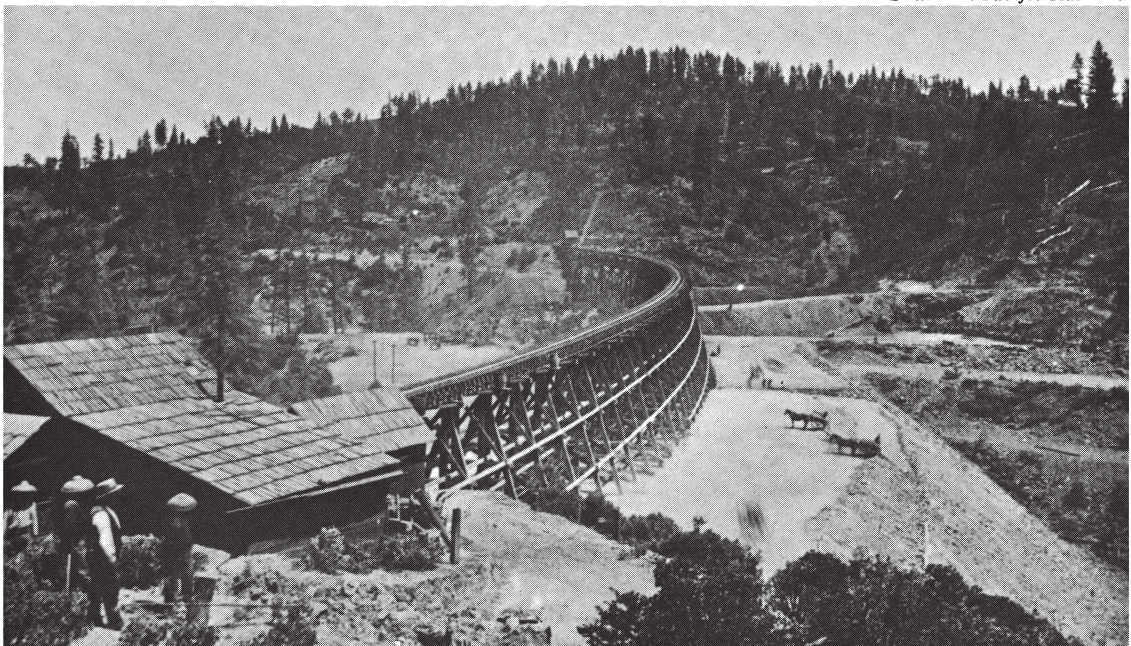
completed a line through the Sierra Nevada Mountains and continued building toward the east. The wonder of this feat can best be told in the words of a forty-niner, who took a pleasure trip on the new railroad in 1868, as far as it went. He recalls experiences in the “dreaded American desert”:

From the Truckee River to the sink of the Humboldt is a sandy desert of 40 miles, dry and arid, where neither water nor grass could be obtained. On this terrible waste, hundreds of teams gave out, and cattle perished. Now, on a train, I make a pleasure trip in a few hours over ground which it took many weeks to pass, with great suffering. Like one recovering from a trance, I gaze around in doubt, wonder, and surprise.

As the two lines approached each other, an exciting race began, with one company trying to build farther west, and

#### A WOODEN TRESTLE ON THE CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD

Chinese laborers used wheelbarrows and carts to make this fill in a gorge near Colfax, California.







*Lyons Museum*

#### FIRST RAILROAD THROUGH THE SIERRA NEVADA MOUNTAINS

This old photograph tells better than words what a task it was to build the first railroad through nearly 150 miles of mountains. Two wood-burning engines chug up the steep grade. The passenger train looks like a huge caterpillar crawling along a ledge.

the other, farther east. Crews worked from sunrise to sunset. In the race against time the Central Pacific made a record, but many Chinese coolies dropped by the tracks from exhaustion.

#### D-O-N-E

ON MAY 10, 1869, the lines met at Promontory, Utah, in the desert country of sand and sagebrush, north of the Great Salt Lake. The spring day was bright and pleasant. During the morning a passenger train arrived from Sacramento with officials of the Central Pacific. Another came with men of the Union Pacific and

invited friends. From Salt Lake City a crowded excursion train arrived with a Mormon band and the army band from Fort Douglas to furnish music for the gala event. Pioneers who had never seen a railroad train came long distances in wagons and on horseback to join the crowd of track-layers, uniformed soldiers, and well-dressed railroad officials and politicians.

It was nearly noon when General Dodge lifted his hand to silence the crowd. The ceremonies opened with a prayer. Then the last two rails were laid, one by Irish immigrants working for the Union Pacific and the other by Chinese laborers for the Central Pacific. Thus did

Europe and Asia grasp hands across the continent of North America. Thus did a path of shining rails take the place of the mythical "Northwest Passage" long sought by the early explorers.

Congressmen, governors, and leaders from the western states were there to present spikes of precious metals for these last two rails and to praise the feat of the railroad-builders.

The speeches lasted over two hours while Utah, Arizona, Nevada, and Montana presented spikes of gold and silver. California's token was a spike of pure gold, worth over \$400 at that time. The last tie of polished laurel was cut from a tree in a California forest. A citizen of Sacramento, where the Central Pacific started, presented the tie and the spike from his home state.

"From her bosom was taken the first

#### MEETING OF THE RAILS — PROMONTORY, UTAH — MAY 10, 1869

Montague, chief engineer of the Central Pacific shook hands with Dodge, chief engineer of the Union Pacific, while each one stood nearest the engine of his company. The Central Pacific engine with the funnel-shaped smokestack made the run from Sacramento, California. The engine with the tall, slender smokestack made the longest run across Nebraska, Wyoming and into Utah, all the way from Omaha on the bank of the Missouri River.

Today, a monument stands on the spot where the rails met. Late in 1942, the last rails of the old line north of the Great Salt Lake were hauled away and sold for scrap to be made into war materials.

*Union Pacific Railroad*



soil," he said, "so let hers be the last tie and the last spike."

To Leland Stanford, president of the Central Pacific, went the honor of driving the last spike with a silver-headed hammer. A telegraph operator tapped in Morse code, the word D-O-N-E. The officials of both lines signed this telegram which was sent to President Grant in Washington:

The last rail is laid, the last spike driven. The Pacific Railroad is completed. The point of junction is 1086 miles west of the Missouri River and 690 miles east of Sacramento City.

After the golden spike had been driven, the two engines were uncoupled and sightseers scrambled aboard for a ride. Slowly Jupiter from the West and One-Nineteen from the East crawled toward each other until the engines met. The crowd cheered wildly. News of the event touched off celebrations in towns and cities throughout the nation. In New York the bells of Trinity Church pealed an invitation to prayer while guns in City Park fired a military salute. In honor of the achievement the new building of the Chicago Tribune was lit that night. On this memorable tenth of May a shipment of tea from Japan left San Francisco for St. Louis over a path of shining rails.

## **SLAUGHTER OF BISON ENDS A WAY OF LIFE**

EARLY ONE MORNING IN 1869 a military scout in Kansas was awakened by a dull and steady roar like the rumble of distant thunder. He and other scouts in his company mounted their ponies and rode in the direction of the rolling thud of tramping hooves. From the safety of a bluff

they gazed for hours upon the mighty herd, a moving mass about twenty miles wide and sixty miles long, heading northwest across the prairie. How many bison were in this herd? They could not guess.

In that same year the first continental railroad was completed. As the Indian had foreseen, the iron horse became his deadly enemy. As fast as the rails were laid, settlers followed the line to farm the land in Nebraska. They scared away the buffalo. From car windows of slow moving trains, passengers shot buffalo for sport. Expert marksmen, shooting with rifles which fired bullets a half mile, were known to kill one hundred and twenty bison in forty minutes. When one buffalo was shot, others gathered around their fallen comrade, pawing the ground and uttering a cry. This habit made the animals easy prey for the sharpshooters. The hunters took the skins, and left the flesh to wolves and buzzards.

The railroads carried trains of box-cars filled with buffalo hides to be made into lap robes in eastern factories. The fashion of buffalo robes in sleighs and carriages almost wiped out the "hunchback cows" on the western plains. The hidehunters, a rugged group of men, made their headquarters in Dodge City, Kansas. From this town in one year, a single firm shipped almost 130,000 hides. The high-powered repeating rifle and the railroad lines doomed the bison.

Ten years after the completion of the first continental railroad, only a few of these shaggy animals could be found anywhere on the plains. At stations along the railroads, buffalo bones were stacked higher than a two-story house. From these stations they were shipped east to be ground into fertilizer for worn-out farms in New England. For years the skeletons of

slain bison bleached on the prairie. Bone-gathering was a regular, recognized business among the poor. While collecting bones in Oklahoma, a frontier poet using a bullet for a pencil scribbled this verse on the shoulder blade of a buffalo.

I pass by the home of the wealthy,  
And I pass by the hut of the poor,  
    But none care for me  
    When my cargo they see,  
And no one will open the door.  
O think of the poor bone Pilgrim.  
    Ye who are safely at home;  
No one to pity me, no one to cheer me,  
    As o'er the lone prairie I roam.

Scott Cummins

This ruthless slaughter of the bison left the Plains Indians in a starving condition. These tribes had always been hunters. They depended upon the buffalo for their living. They ate the meat, made clothing and tepees from the hides, and fashioned the bones into tools. The end of the bison brought an end to their way of life. Their loss, swift and sudden, left the Indians dazed and confused. They fought the hidehunters with fury. However, Indian arrows were no match for the rifles, six-shooters, and knives carried by these tough and bloody killers. The once-proud Indian hunters turned to bone-gathering to eke out a miserable existence.

Trains of covered wagons and miles of shining rails snaked across the plains, bringing emigrants to settle in the old hunting grounds of the Indians. The Indians tried to stop them but on they came in an endless procession, these palefaced people with a longing for land. A territory, called Oklahoma, which means "land of the red men" was set aside by the Federal Government as an Indian Reservation. Some of the tribes of the



Currier

### THE ROAD – WINTER

**The fad of buffalo hides for sleigh robes caused the ruthless slaughter of the western bison on which the Plains Indians depended for food, clothing, and shelter.**

plains the Pawnees, the Poncas, the Iowas, the Omahas, the Kiowas, the Osages and others – found it necessary to follow another "Trail of Tears" to the Indian Territory.

### THE CLASH OF TWO CIVILIZATIONS

WHEN INDIANS SOLD their land, they did not realize that they bartered away their rights to hunt in the forests and to fish in the streams of their old hunting ground. To an Indian, the birds, the beasts, the trees, the flowers, and the streams were not a part of the land. These belonged to everyone, but the European had another idea of ownership. When he owned land, everything on the ground – plants, animals, rivers – belonged to him.

The European who settled in this country did not clearly understand the Indian principle of tribal law, "All for one and one for all." When Indian buffalo hunters returned from a chase, the meat was divided among the families of their village. The widows, the aged, and the sick

shared the spoils of the hunt with those who had killed the bison, skinned the animals, and cut up the meat. In the Indian code there was less private ownership of the necessities of life than in the European way of living. Although each family raised corn, melons, squash, and pumpkins on little plots of ground, the land itself was owned by the tribe as a whole. The red man did not understand the white man's greed for personal gain. If an Indian had shelter, food, and clothing, though meager, he was satisfied. If ten acres of corn provided enough meal for his family, why plant twenty acres? Because of this character trait, the white man thought the red man was lazy. On the other hand the Indian was at a loss to understand why his European neighbors should want more land to plant more corn to make more money, with which to buy more land to

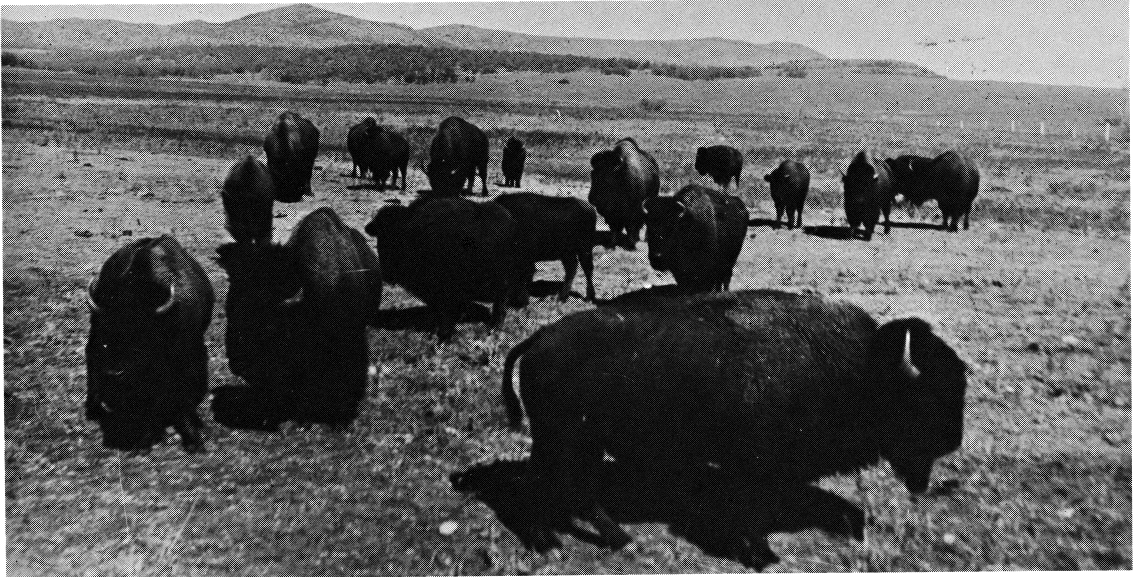
plant more corn to make MORE money. The red man thought the white man was greedy.

At heart the native Indian was deeply religious. He was a nature-worshiper like most primitive peoples. His belief in the Great Spirit was akin to the Christian idea of God. The Indian's religious services were rituals performed in dance, song, and pantomime because he spoke to the Great Spirit through music. The actors in these sacred dramas painted their faces and wore costumes. The buffalo dance was a thanksgiving for a successful hunt. The harvest festivals, in honor of the giver of corn, were elaborate rituals which lasted for days. H'atira Hu Weta Arioso is a prayer that is always sung. It is part of a religious drama of the Pawnees in which the Indians ask for children and corn to feed them, and that their race may live on and never die. The

#### **BUFFALO ON A RESERVATION IN OKLAHOMA**

**The American bison is not extinct. Herds exist on a number of western reservations where they are protected.**

*Oklahoma Historical Society*



four words, a poem in the Pawnee language, state that corn gives life, like a mother. There is an unseen spirit which gives life to the corn that the corn may give its life that the Indian may live.

The red man's religious rites were not like the services in the white man's church. The European, not understanding these ceremonials, dubbed the Indian "a painted savage."

The Plains Indians were hunters. Under the guidance of Sitting Bull, the Dakotas, Sioux, and Cheyennes rallied the tribes in a last desperate attempt to hold their hunting grounds. Thinking the Indian forces numbered not more than a thousand warriors, General George Armstrong Custer met them in battle near the Little Big Horn River in Montana, June 25, 1876. His small band was surrounded by over four thousand warriors armed with rifles and plenty of ammunition. Every man was killed, including General Custer. It was the Indian's last stand except for raids here and there upon settlers.

From the beginning the two ways of life clashed because they were so different. Thinking his way of living the better one, the white man sought to impose it upon the red man. The Indian, proud of his heritage, clung to his customs, his religion, and his tribal law. The result was feud, war, and massacre until the tribes, outnumbered and defeated, were moved to reservations under the protection of the Federal Government. Agents of the Government were stationed in the Indian country to persuade the tribes that they should settle down on the reservations allotted to them and till the soil. It took time for the hunter to trade his rifle for a plow. After the Custer Massacre, the Indian tribes on the Central Plains were scattered on reserva-

tions from Canada to Oklahoma. Many kindly citizens believed it was better for the Indians to live apart from the Europeans. They welcomed the removal of the tribes to the Indian Territory. They hoped these native Americans would find peace and happiness in a land all their own. The tribes had scarcely settled in this territory for red men ONLY, when they found themselves living again among white neighbors — the cattlemen of the Southwest.

For many years before Oklahoma was made the Indian Territory, this area had been a hunting ground for the Indian tribes and an open range for the cattlemen of the Southwest. Along the streams the Indians had trapped beaver; in the woods they hunted deer and quail. It was also a stockman's paradise as the grass grew tall and thick and the streams were full of water. The Indian hunted and the cattleman used the pasture. Both were satisfied.

## LONGHORNS TO HEREFORDS

THE LONGHORNS WERE distant cousins of cattle brought by the Moors from Africa to Spain during the eighth century. When Columbus made his second voyage in 1493, his ships carried a cargo of these "Moorish" cattle to Santo Domingo in the West Indies. Every vessel bringing colonists from Spain had a shipment of cattle and horses for their ranchos in the New World. Wherever the Spaniards settled, livestock went with them. When Coronado made his journey north in search of the Seven Cities of Cibola, he took along five hundred cattle to feed the men in his expedition. This was less than fifty years after the first voyage. The cattle industry, founded by Columbus, grew rapidly and is



*Union Pacific Railroad*

**LAYING TRACK 300 MILES WEST OF THE MISSOURI RIVER  
KANSAS-PACIFIC RAILROAD, OCTOBER 19, 1869**

**Ranchers in Texas wanted a railroad on which to ship their cattle to eastern markets. In the same year that the Union Pacific met the Central Pacific in Utah, the Kansas-Pacific Railroad was being pushed westward in Kansas. The prairie town of Abilene became a shipping point for cattle and buffalo hides. It was the end of the "Chizzum Trail."**

still big business throughout the Americas.

Since there were no fences, cattle wandered from the large Mexican ranches and were lost to their owners. From these strays, herds of wild cattle grew up to roam over the plains of the Southwest. These animals were really wild, with the keen sense of a deer and the fighting pluck of a grizzly bear. When a pack of wolves broke into a herd, the cows quickly bunched their calves and formed a tight circle to protect their young. Facing a solid wall of long horns the hungry wolves howled in vain.

Other imported breeds mixed with the wild cattle. The Spaniards were fond of black cows and this strain, too, found its way into the herds on the plains. Thus came into being the famous breed, the longhorns. With a mixed ancestry the longhorns were brindled-blue, mouse-

colored, creamy-tan, reddish brown, pale red, or black with spots of white, red, and tan. In addition to horns with as much as a nine-foot spread, these animals had long legs, long tails, and long backs that sometimes swayed in the middle.

Many a future cattle baron of Texas made a start by capturing the best specimens of the wild herds. These cattle were free for the taking but the taking was not an easy matter. When chased by men on horseback, the wild creatures switched their long tails, snorted their anger, and battled for their freedom.

The longhorns survived droughts in summer and blizzards in winter. In hard months they ate the prickly pear on the thorny cactus plant and quenched their thirst with the juice of the fruit. When grass dried up, they nibbled brush like deer and

chewed the leaves of withered trees. Sensing a storm in the air a longhorn herd instinctively headed toward the south, stringing along in a thin line. When a blizzard overtook them, they lowered their heads, turned their tails to the driving snow, and drifted with the wind. These animals were weather-wise in all seasons of the year. The longhorn inherited the plains from the buffalo. This hardy breed with flat ribs, lanky bodies, and hunched shoulders founded the great cattle industry of the Southwest.

## ON THE OLD CHIZZUM TRAIL

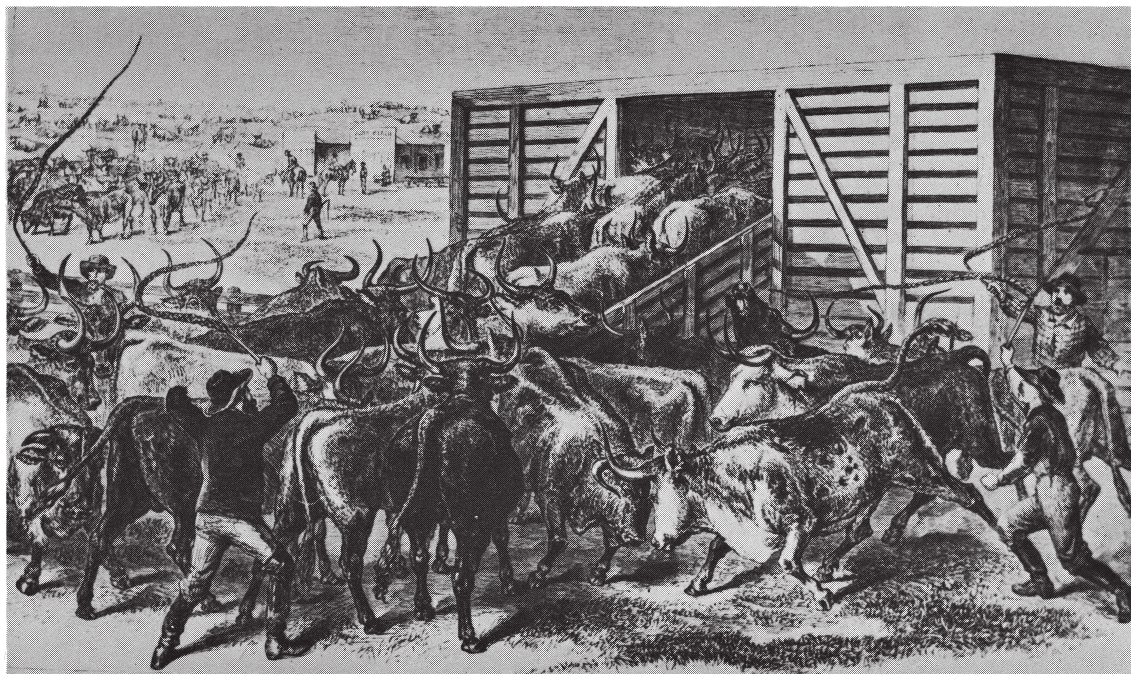
AFTER THE FALL of Vicksburg in July of 1863, the Mississippi River was under the control of the Union armies. The

cattlemen in the seceded state of Texas lost their markets in towns along the river from St. Louis to New Orleans. By the end of the War Between the States in 1865 there were about 3,000,000 cattle on the range in Texas. In the northeastern states the demand for beef boosted prices. How could the cattlemen get their stock to market?

A cattle buyer finally persuaded a railroad company to lay a track as far west as Abilene, Kansas. Then the longhorns could be driven through unsettled country and loaded into cars for shipment to the meat packing centers of Kansas City and Chicago. Ranchers from southern Texas had tried driving their cattle to St. Louis. They lost much of their stock going through the Indian Territory where the Five Civilized Tribes fought both herds and herders. The bloodsucking ticks

### LOADING LONGHORNS AT ABILENE, KANSAS, IN 1871

*Kansas State Historical Society*





carried in by the tough longhorns attacked other breeds owned by the Indians and the animals died of tick fever.

The first herd, driven to Abilene two years after the war, followed a trail marked

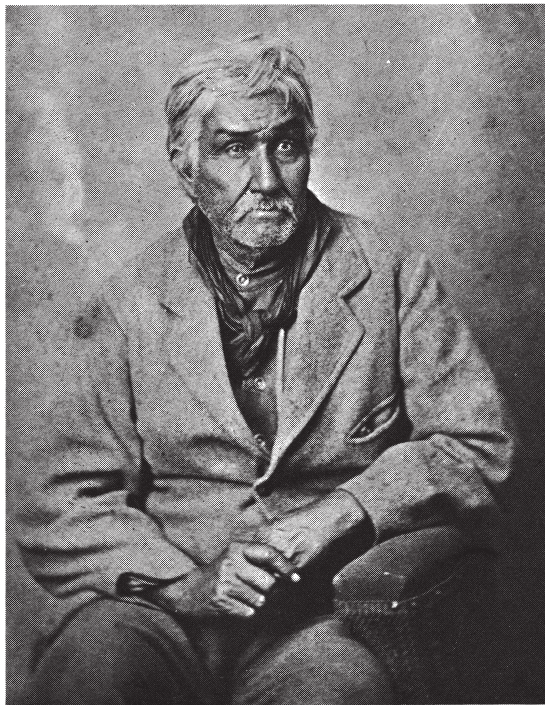
### JESSE CHISHOLM

Jesse Chisholm was a trader, not a cattleman. His father was a Scotch Irish frontiersman in Tennessee, and his mother was part Cherokee Indian. As a boy about ten years old, Jesse journeyed over the "Trail of Tears" to the Indian Territory.

As a young man, he began to mark trails to trade with the Indian tribes of the prairie. They trusted him in business and sought his advice in trouble.

The first herd of longhorns driven north tramped over his main trail in the Indian Territory. Ever after, the full length of the route from San Antonio, Texas to Abilene, Kansas was called the "Chizzum Trail." The following spring, Jesse Chisholm died. Little did this quiet, honest, and kind frontiersman dream that his name would find a place in history and be celebrated in song.

*Oklahoma Historical Society*



by the storekeeper and trader, Jesse Chisholm. This route of the longhorns from San Antonio to Abilene became known as the "Chizzum Trail." Many a boy in Texas longed for the day when he could "hit the trail." Driving cattle to the railroad line in Kansas was an adventure, not a job. The salary was \$30 a month for beginners, with food furnished from the chuck wagon.

From the wild herds of mustangs the cowboys captured horses for their work on the range. The mustangs, free for the taking, were as daring as the cowboys who roped them and broke them to the saddle. The stocky ponies would dash into the thick of a wild stampede or plunge into a swollen stream to swim with the herd. With all its hardships the cattlemen clung to the adventurous life of the open range. He spent his days jogging in the saddle over a vast domain, wild and free. At night, when not on watch, he made a cocoon of his blankets and slept on the ground.

The dangers and hardships of the cowboys were many but so were the thrills. Life on the old Chisholm Trail can best be told in the words of those who traveled it:

When I was sixteen years old, the son of a cattleman asked me to go up the trail with him. Of course I was willing, but my mother objected. It took a good deal of persuading on the part of Pete and myself to get her to consent for me to go. She gave in, however, and I went with Pete to a shoe shop where he ordered a pair of boots made for me. These boots cost \$14. He also gave me a pair of bell spurs, a Colt's cap and ball six-shooter, and a rim-fire Winchester, as well as a pair of leather leggins which cost \$12. This was the first time in my life that I had been rigged out, and you bet I was proud.

We started with the herd about the middle of March, 1871, with 2500 cattle. — We reached our destination, Kansas, where Pete sold out, and we came back home together.



*Kansas State Historical Society*

### DODGE CITY, KANSAS, IN THE 1880'S

This town grew up at the place where the Western Trail from San Antonio, Texas to Ogallala, Nebraska crossed the Santa Fe Railroad. From this center cattle, hides and bones were shipped to eastern markets.

One of the great hazards of this journey was swimming the herds across the rivers. There were no bridges. One cowboy tells of crossing the Red River, swollen with recent rains:

Several of us boys tried to swim across. None were successful but another fellow and myself, and I only upon second trial, as my first horse drowned under me and I was forced to get another. We two had our hands full, as we had to sing to about six thousand cattle to keep them together.

The trail drivers used music to quiet their cattle when the animals became restless and nervous. If the herd became frightened by thunder and lightning or some unfamiliar sound, it might stampede. During the night the cowboys kept watch in four shifts. When young steers refused to lie down and milled around in circles, the cowboys sang lullabies to quiet them. Sometimes the cowpunchers played tunes on fiddles, guitars, and harmonicas. One wrote:



*Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce*

### BAREBACK BRONC RIDING

In early days on the plains, cowboys captured wild mustangs and tamed them for their riding horses. It was exciting and dangerous work. Today, on western ranches cowboys still break untamed horses (broncs) to the saddle. At rodeos and fairs, they display their riding skill for sport, prizes, and championships, under strict regulations. Rules for bareback bronc riding are printed in a program of Cheyenne Frontier Days:

This is strictly a one-hand contest, with rigging attached to a surcingle, which is grasped with one hand. In short — no saddle, no halter, no rein, just the flat, slippery deck of a dynamite-laden bronc . . . Naturally, the rider is not permitted to “tightleg” or hold with his knees and he must keep raking his spurs fore and aft across the horse’s flanks for the whole eight seconds of the ride.

Often I have taken my old fiddle on herd at night when on the trail, and, while one of my companions led my horse around the herd, I reeled off such oldtime tunes as “Shake That Wooden Leg,” “Arkansaw Traveler,” and “The Unfortunate Pup.” And say, brothers, those old long-horned steers actually enjoyed that old-time music.

The women who lived on the frontier were as brave as the men. One woman who went with her husband on a trail trip tells of her experiences:

In the early spring of 1871, my husband rounded up his cattle. We started north in April with about ten cowboys, mostly Mexicans, the cooks, and a thousand head of cattle. The cattle were driven only about ten miles a day, so they would have plenty of time to graze and fatten along the way. — Our herd was stampeded one day, supposedly by Indians. It was a horrible, yet fascinating sight. Frantic cowboys tried to stop the wild flight, but nothing could check it. The men gathered the cattle in about a week’s time. After a stampede, the men would be almost exhausted. I felt so sorry for one of them, a young tenderfoot. The boy lay down and was soon sleeping so soundly that he did not hear us breaking camp, and we forgot him when we left. The boy overtook us late in the evening, and said that he would not have awakened then if an approaching herd had not almost run over him.

Young men liked the excitement and adventure of driving cattle to the railroad line in Kansas and the stayover in the lawless frontier towns of Dodge City and Abilene.

The cattlemen whose herds roamed the prairie had a profitable business. During the twenty years following the War Between the States millions of cattle were driven over the trails to Kansas. It cost only about fifty cents to raise a longhorn steer for market and that was the cost of branding him. The animals foraged for their food and took care of themselves.

Like the Indians before them, the cattlemen were driven from their empire when the plowmen invaded the open range. Barbed wire brought an end, too, to the reign of the Texas longhorns. The master of the trail and king of the plains now cooped on ranches behind fences, was no longer profitable for cattlemen. They turned from this lean, lanky-framed stock to the meaty Hereford, with short horns,



*Union Pacific Railroad*

#### **HEREFORDS BEING DRIVEN IN FROM THE RANGE IN WYOMING**

**These white-faced, short-horned, broad-backed Herefords are good rustlers, steady grazers, and can be fattened on grass. The breed is popular today in the ranch country of the Central Plains where the longhorn vanished as did the buffalo.**

short legs and round bodies. Today these gentle, white faced cattle have replaced the ill-tempered, nervous, untamed longhorns that have all but vanished, along with the buffalo.

The path of shining rails had

brought a new way of life to the Central Plains.

**MAP:**

WA24r

*Our United States* by Edgar B. Wesley