

Summary: Linking East and West

The Telegraph Helps Communication

In the early 1800s the only way to get a message or news from one place to another was to travel there. Sometimes news from one part of the country didn't reach another part for several weeks. In 1844, a new kind of communication was introduced. The new telegraph machine sent electric signals through wires to a distant location. Samuel Morse invented a code for sending messages. People could send and get messages in just a few minutes. By 1861, telegraph wires stretched from coast to coast. Reporters sent news stories to their newspapers, and people sent personal messages and business information. During the Civil War, battle plans were made using the telegraph.

A Transcontinental Railroad

Many Americans began moving west by the 1840s. They were looking for gold and for farmland. There were only two good ways to travel. One way was to sail around the tip of South America. The other way was to travel to the end of the railroad line and take a rough trail on land in wagons pulled by horses, mule, or oxen. Both ways were long, difficult, and expensive. In 1862, railroad companies got money and land from Congress to build a transcontinental railroad to connect the coasts. The Union Pacific hired former Civil War soldiers, formerly enslaved African Americans, and Irish immigrants to build track from east to west. They started in Nebraska with existing railroad lines from the east coast. The Central Pacific hired many Chinese immigrants to lay tracks from California toward the east. Because of prejudice, these workers were paid less than other workers and given the most dangerous jobs.

The two tracks met at Promontory Point, Utah on May 10, 1869, to make a 1,800 mile long transcontinental railroad. It was the first of several railroads. It was easier to cross the continent by train. Western farmers made money by shipping cattle and wheat to the east.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

transcontinental *adjective*, from one edge of a continent to the other
prejudice *noun*, an unfair negative opinion that can lead to unjust treatment

After You Read

REVIEW How did people travel west in the 1840s? Circle the two sentences that tell how people traveled.

REVIEW What kinds of goods were shipped on transcontinental railroads? Circle the words that describe what Western farmers sold to the east in order to make money.