

Chronology of Railroad History Events 1862 - 1870

1862

Congress passes the Pacific Railroad Act, which authorizes the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Companies to build a transcontinental rail line along the 42nd parallel and provides public lands and subsidies for every mile of track laid.

Congress passes the Homestead Act, which allows citizens to settle on up to 160 acres of surveyed but unclaimed public land and receive title to it after making improvements and residing there for five years.

1864

The Union Pacific Railroad begins moving westward, laying track at an average rate of one mile per day. In California, Chinese laborers join the Central Pacific work gangs, providing the strength, organization and persistence needed to break through the mountains.

1867

The first cattle drive from Texas up the Chisholm Trail arrives at the rail yards of Abilene, Kansas. The last round up was in 1881.

1869

A Golden Spike completes the transcontinental railroad at Promontory Point, Utah.

1870

Buffalo hunters begin moving onto the plains, brought there by the expanding railroads and the growing market for hides and meat back east. In little more than a decade, they reduce the once numberless herd to an endangered species.

Railroad companies begin massive advertising campaigns to attract settlers to their land grants in the West, sending agents to rural areas in the eastern states and throughout Europe to distribute handbills, posters and pamphlets that tout the rich soil and favorable climate of the region. But the higher costs of railroad land compared to public lands, and the fact that railroads pay no taxes on their lands, soon stirs charges of extortion, leading to state laws controlling railroad rates and land sale practices by the decade's end

The Union Pacific in Wyoming hires Chinese laborers for \$32.50 a month rather than pay \$52.00 a month to whites. From incidents like this one, white laborers across the West develop the opinion that Chinese immigrants are competing unfairly for jobs, a feeling that will lead to violent racial conflict and labor unrest in years to come. There were violent anti-Chinese riots in Los Angeles in 1871.