

Linking the Rails

It has been called the greatest historical event in transportation on the North American continent. On May 10, 1869, the Union Pacific tracks joined those of the Central Pacific Railroad in Promontory, Utah. Completion of the project, however, required overcoming enormous challenges that would have defeated lesser leadership.

After the California Gold Rush in 1848, Americans dreamed of a transcontinental railroad linking the East with the West. Such a route to the Pacific Ocean would cover 2,000 miles of land, a desert and two rugged mountain ranges – the Rockies and the Sierra Nevada.

Leland Stanford, Collis P. Huntington, Charles Crocker and Mark Hopkins were the “Big Four” who conceived this enterprise and brought it to fruition. Huntington looked after the financing of the company. Crocker, with his tremendous energy, forced the construction of the rails over the snow-crested Sierra and across the burning deserts of Nevada and Utah. Stanford kept his focus on the main points leading to success, and Hopkins saw that none of the money was wasted. That pioneer railroad line of the middle 1860s formed the basis of the gigantic Southern Pacific system.

The connection of the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific slashed the four to six months’ time taken by the overland pioneers to six days. Just consider what a remarkable feat for its time this venture proved to be. At once, the Pacific states were transformed, and Western life gradually caught up with the life and aspirations of the East.

Making it happen was anything but easy. Aside from the construction costs, the toll on workers was great. Winter snowstorms and digging tunnels through solid rock forced many workers to leave their jobs. Many others, however, stayed loyal to the mission, despite the hardships. Finally, the dream was realized.

By now – no matter what your age – you have discovered that your journey through life is no bed of roses. It brings surprises, setbacks and roadblocks that seem insurmountable. Additionally, your chosen career in long-term health care is demanding. It requires hard work, commitment to the residents and, at times, the emptying of emotions.

But to keep on doing good – even when it is difficult – with responsibility and purpose brings its own reward of peace, joy and contentment in the jobs that we are called to do.

--Beecher Hunter