

## **Better than Wagon Train but Still an Adventure**

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The completion of the railroad cut the time in which a trans-continental journey could be made to a few days. It also eliminated almost all the hardships of former sea and wagon train travel, but a journey by train by no means lacked adventure. There was no through equipment at that time. Union Pacific cars and Pullmans went only as far west as Ogden. There passengers changed to Central Pacific cars and Silver Palace cars. Meals were served at certain stopping places. The usual charge was \$1.00 although the Colfax eating house made a specialty of 75 cent meals.

Before the railroad was completed a group of easterners visited the end of the Union Pacific track. It was considered so perilous an undertaking that upon their return to Chicago the Mayor officially welcomed them back to civilization.

One early traveler, W.L. Humason of Hartford, Connecticut wrote his experiences under the heading of "From Atlantic Surf to the Golden Gate." The journey he describes started at Omaha and includes experiences at Ogden where they changed for Promontory.

"Twelve o'clock came, also the train, and with no sleeping cars. We took seats and reached Promontory about daylight. We were at the end of the Union Pacific Railroad. Our further journeys were to be over the Central Pacific. Owing to a quarrel or misunderstanding between the superintendents of these two roads, we found that we could make no connection and could not leave the place until evening. The passengers became very indignant and there was some tall talk which fell unpleasantly upon the ears of Mr. Marsh, a Central Pacific director, who had come to Ogden to meet us and had done all in his power to remedy the matter and prevent the delay. The officials of the Union Pacific ordered us out of their cars, saying they had use for them. They had carried us to the end of their road and they had nothing more to do with us only to discharge us. Out we were turned into the hot sun with no shade, no house, surrounded by no comforts – nothing but sand, alkali and sage brush. The road had been finished so far ahead of time that the Central Pacific had no sleeping cars and would have none until July."

The train finally arrived. He tells how he spent the night. "I went forward into the baggage car, rolled up in my blankets, cast my lot among the mail bags and slept soundly until morning. I awoke covered and choking with dust.

"One feature of our journey was the interesting sight of large numbers of Chinamen constantly at work upon the road, making the bed wider and the track more secure. These Chinamen are not to be immediately discharged, but are to continue their labor until the Central is made in every respect a first-class road."

He continues: "As we descended the mountains, the snow storm turned into a rain storm and we reached Sacramento in the midst of it." He took a steamer down the Sacramento River, seeing huge piles of salmon that had been caught in the river and were waiting to be loaded on the boat. He expressed surprise at the advanced stage of crops and vegetables along the shore, including strawberries ready for harvest.

William R. Stockton, who came west on an emigrant ticket in 1872 describes his trip from Taswell County, Illinois, to Sacramento. "The cars were very much like the construction cars of the 1920's, except they were much smaller. The seats were of bare boards, and for windows they had small peek holes high up on the sides where one at a time might stand to see out." For this reason, during the nine days from Omaha to San Francisco he spent most of the daytime hours on the top of the cars.

The emigrant trains were sociable affairs. People got acquainted, shared their food, washed clothes, cooked on the stove at the end of the car and entertained each other. Many meetings and marriages occurred aboard these trains just as they had in the covered wagon trains.

Glenn Dumke, in his book "Boom of the Eighties," said, "Emigrant cars aided poor settlers by providing folding seats which could be flattened into beds and cooking accommodations. Emigrant houses furnished a week's free lodging while travelers earned enough to continue their journey. 'Land-seeker's ticket was a method by which the fare paid would be applied on the purchase of railway-owned land. Railway land was sold by installments and special reduced rates were given to colonists who traveled and settled together."

Later travelers moved with greater ease. Advertisements after 1900 told prospective emigrants that colonization cars were "similar in all respects to standard sleeping cars except in upholstery, which is rattan instead of plush. They have a large smoking washroom for gentlemen and a lavatory and toilet for ladies." Each car was personally conducted across the continent by a railroad agent.

After the Santa Fe came to California, a rate war developed in which the two lines began cutting rates to bring passengers west. By March 6, 1887, the fare had fallen from \$15 for first class fare to \$1 a day – but soon this was raised back to \$50 for the first class fare and \$40 for second, compared with \$118 and \$85 the year before.

Following the rate war, the railroads both started running thousands of "Zulu cars," as they were known. One member of the family traveled with livestock and belongings with the remainder riding in passenger cars at low rates. In one year, SP had moved 120,000 arrivals into Los Angeles. Townsites, 60 of them, sprang up in the surrounding areas. By 1888 Los Angeles County had 100 towns platted and with streets named. By 1889 the number of colonists carried by SP into the West and Southwest was equivalent to 70 per cent of the increase in population following the opening of the Central Pacific.

Dumke said, “The Southern Pacific – Central Pacific Railroad cannot be denied acknowledgement that is due for the role it played in helping bring attention to and in its development of California.”

Land values jumped. The gold rush made Northern California a real part of the United States; the land boom of the ‘80s did the same for the south.