

Anticipated Rich Trade Vanished after Rails Met

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Visions the directors of the Pacific railroad had of a lucrative business from two immediate sources, Oriental trade and traffic connected with Nevada Mines, did not materialize. The very month the rails were joined the French opened the Suez Canal wiping out hope for Far East trade and Nevada silver mining went into a slump.

In order to gain back the Oriental trade, in 1872 the Occidental and Oriental Steamship Company was founded. It competed with the Pacific Mail, a steamship line which earlier had worked harmoniously with the transcontinental railroads, but later decided to route its traffic to the Isthmus of Panama for trans-shipment to the East Coast. Central Pacific's wharves were placed at the disposal of the steamship line while the ocean carrier agreed to establish monthly service. A compromise was then reached with the Pacific Mail and the two lines established service with a sailing every 15 days. (The Pacific Mail was finally purchased by Central Pacific in 1880.) Vessels sailed from San Francisco directly to Yokohama and then to Hong Kong, returning by the same route. Round trips took about three months. Three steamers were on line in each direction at all times.

The ships carried from 30 to 68 first class passengers, but far more important were the cargoes which generated three times as much revenue eastbound as westbound. In order of their importance cargoes were tea, silk, merchandise, rice, hemp, sugar and opium. Westbound, flour was the most important.

But the Big Four realized that local traffic – which produced the bulk of their business – was dependent upon people and the railroad used a variety of means to attract settlers and vacationers to California.

Early Colonization. A typical Central Pacific ad in 1875 read “Ho for California! The Laborer's Paradise! Salubrious Climate, Fertile Soil, Large Labor Returns, No Severe Winters, No Lost Time, No Blight or Insect Pests.”

The Central Pacific had promptly extended a rail line into the San Joaquin Valley in 1869. The area was practically unoccupied but the Big Four envisioned the country dotted with cities and its rich acreage cultivated by settlers who would be attracted by the railroad. Towns were platted and lots were opened for settlement. The price of land “in Southern California situated between San Francisco, Los Angeles and Fort Yuma,” according to other ads, ranged from \$1.00 to \$10.00 per acre, according to location.

Lecturers with lantern slides carried the word of the golden opportunity to countless audiences in this country and Europe. The railroad passenger department put out various booklets, “The

Prune Primer, The Cotton Primer,” etc. – about the many possible crops that could be raised in the territory.

In 1888, '89, '90 and '91, Southern Pacific sent five-car trains through the Middle West with exhibits of California products and agricultural displays by California counties, these trains being known as “California on Wheels.” Joseph B. Lauck, special passenger agent who worked out the itineraries for these trips, related in 1924; “California was considered by many Easterners in those days as the wild and woolly West, and in a little town in Missouri a woman called at the train saying she had heard that the wife of a railroad representative was aboard and she wanted to see a real live woman from California.”

The exhibits of actual products told their own story and the scheme was a big factor in attracting home seekers to the Pacific Coast states.