

## **Transcontinental Railroad Overview**

Although some had dreamed of connecting the continent by rail and several had already started the planning, it wasn't until Abraham Lincoln signed the bill, "Pacific Railroad Act of 1862" that the transcontinental railroad became a possibility. Two railroad companies were hired to do the job. The Central Pacific Railroad would work east from Sacramento and the Union Pacific Railroad would work west. The race was on to lay railroad track as quickly (not as best) as possible. A meeting point for the two rails was not established and whoever could lay the most track would receive more money in the form of United States bonds and land grants.

The Central Pacific Railroad faced the monumental task of building through the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Progress was slowed by tall mountains, tall trees and terrible weather. The company laid track through California, Nevada and into Utah. Many workers on this Railroad were Chinamen. Chinamen did not receive the same pay as other workers because of prejudice. However, they worked harder and with great skill. Without the efforts of the Chinamen and the terrifying work they performed, the railroad may have never made it through the mountains of California.

The Union Pacific Railroad faced other problems in the east. Severe weather and flooding slowed down progress. Bridges were washed out and had to be rebuilt. Also, good trees for building railroad ties and structures were not available in the plains region. The railroad chose to use trees like cottonwoods which were inferior in quality. Sometimes these trees had to be hauled from miles away. Many workers on this railroad were Civil War Veterans or Irish immigrants. Construction workers were paid about \$2.50 a day with room and board. This was a good wage for men looking for work to start a new life. The Union Pacific started in Omaha, Nebraska and worked its way west into Utah. This is the railroad that was built through Wyoming.

Both railroads were joined on May 10, 1869 at Promontory Point in the Utah territory. The railroad was complete and transcontinental train services began. It was now cheaper to ride the trains across the country than weather the seas or trod along the trails. An average cost was a mere \$65 per person.

The railroads changed the west. End of Track towns came to life all along the route as people moved in to support the railroad or to make new lives in the west. Some of these towns survived and are still doing well today. What are some towns in Wyoming that began as End of Track towns on the railroad?