

USA Studies Weekly

Ancient America to Westward Expansion

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GRADE
5

Wanted: Pony Express Riders

The Pony Express was a mail service of horseback riders who delivered mail from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California. The riders did so in the amazingly short time of only 8-10 days. Today, a letter can travel the same distance in two to three days using regular mail. However, in the late 1800s, it usually took the mail at least 25 days to make it by stagecoach and much longer by wagon or ship.

The stage and freight company of Russell, Majors and Waddell started the Pony Express. The owners of the company came up with the idea of sending out horsemen to ride almost constantly. The riders would only stop every 10-15 miles for a fresh horse and every 50-75 miles to change riders. By having so few stops, the mail could travel in record time.

Pony Express riders had to know how to ride and manage horses. One story says a

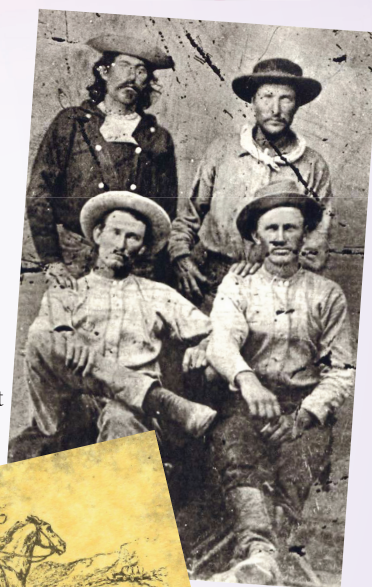
California newspaper ran an ad from the hiring company that said, "Wanted. Young, skinny, wiry fellows. Not over 18. Must be expert riders. Willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred." This ad made the job sound very dangerous. (Wiry means slim and strong.) Not all historians agree that this was a real ad. One historian found an ad for the Pony Express from the "Sacramento Union" that ran on March 19, 1860. It said, "Men Wanted! The undersigned wishes to hire ten or a dozen men, familiar with the management of horses, as hostlers or riders on the Overland Express Route via Salt Lake City. Wages, \$50 per month and found (room and board) ..."

Pony Express riders carried the mail in a mochila, which is Spanish for knapsack. The mochila was a rectangle-shaped, blanket-like leather bag. It was designed to fit snugly over the saddle. The mochila had four cantinas

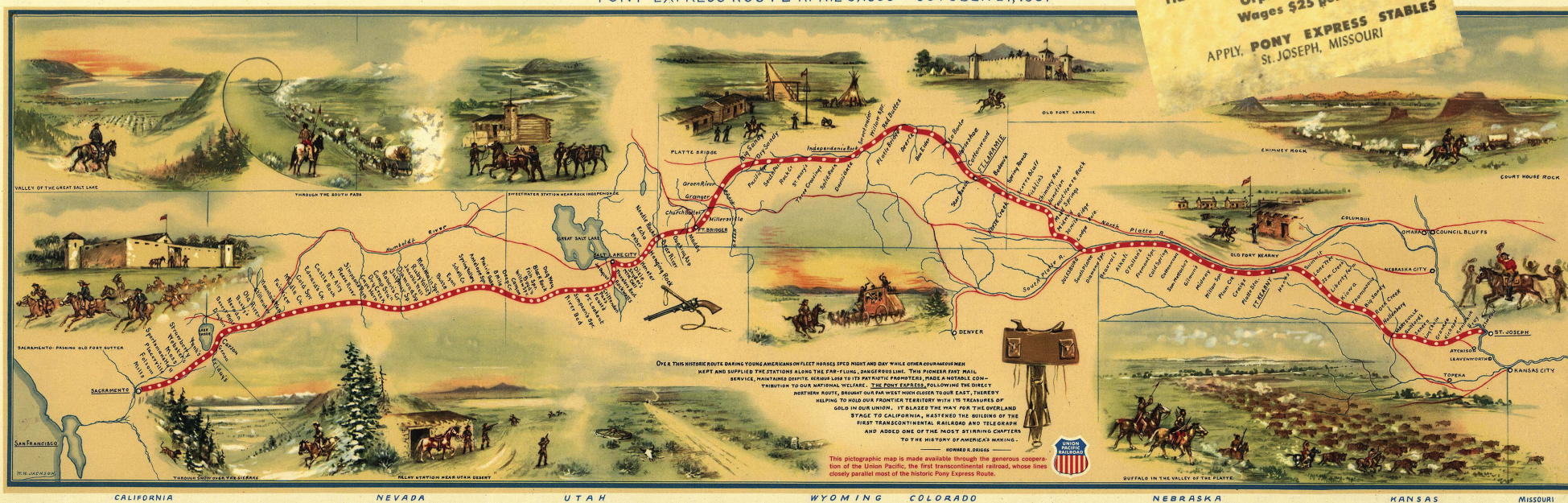
(pockets) to hold the mail. Stationmasters would lock each cantina to prevent the mail from being stolen. Only the stationmasters at each end of the line had keys to the locks. When riders changed horses or riders, they lifted the mochila off one horse and placed it on the back of the fresh horse.

The pony express was a quick and exciting way to deliver the mail, but it didn't last long. The first rider set out from St. Joseph, Missouri, on April 3, 1860. But by then, a telegraph line from St. Louis to Salt Lake City was almost

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



PONY EXPRESS ROUTE APRIL 3, 1860 - OCTOBER 24, 1861



Connections

Staying Connected

Suppose you live in Missouri and your grandparents live in California. How would you let them know you just won a blue ribbon at the science fair? Would you write them a letter? Send an email? Call them on the phone? Text them the good news?

Today, we are able to stay more connected with friends and family than ever before. In the early 1800s, you probably would have written your grandparents a letter and waited almost a month

for them to get it. Then, it would have taken at least another month to get a letter back from them congratulating you on your good news. Today, many kids your age email their grandparents, but a large number of kids are able to text family members using their own or their parents' cell phones.

According to a recent survey, 22% of kids six-nine years old and 60% of kids 10-14 years old have their own cell phones. This makes it easier than ever

to stay in touch with people who live far away—even grandparents! While some adults worry about kids having their own cell phones, many children continue to get them at even younger ages.

How do you communicate with friends and family who live far away? Chances are, you email, call them on the phone or send a text rather than writing a letter. The pony express riders would be amazed if they could see us now!

Florida Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: SS.5.A.1.1: Use primary and secondary sources to understand history. **SS.5.A.6.3:** Examine 19th century advancements (canals, roads, steamboats, flat boats, overland wagons, Pony Express, railroads) in transportation and communication. **SS.5.C.2.5:** Identify ways good citizens go beyond basic civic and political responsibilities to improve government and society. **SS.5.E.1.3:** Trace the development of technology and the impact of major inventions on business productivity during the early development of the United States. **SS.5.G.4.1** Use geographic knowledge and skills when discussing current events.



“Jackson! I’ve got my camera ready. Where, and when, should we go today?”

“Well, Alana, I think we should see some of the great innovations, or inventions, in transportation. The country grew and spread out across the West starting in the early 1880s. It was difficult for people to stay in touch and move from place to place. It didn’t take long, though, for some great inventors to do their part to help shrink the distance between the East and West.”

“What do you mean ‘shrink the distance’? They didn’t really make the country smaller!”

“No, Alana, you’re right. But they did make traveling from place to place much faster than ever before. This made it feel like the distance between the East and West had shrunk.”

“Sounds interesting ... where do we start?”

“I thought we could visit the National Road to begin with, and then the Erie Canal and the transcontinental railroad.”

“Sounds great, let’s go! CLICK ...”

The National Road

When brave settlers began moving west in the early 1800s, poor quality roads became a serious problem. And the Appalachian Mountains cut the country almost in half, which made the trip difficult for early travelers. The mountains also made it almost impossible for western farmers to ship their produce to the East Coast. Congress decided it was time to build a new, hard-surface road across the Appalachians and to the western farmlands. Horses, mules and oxen hauled materials and supplies, but people actually built the road by hand. First, workers cleared trees and brush off the land. After lining the roadbed with smooth rocks and sand, workers poured gravel on top.

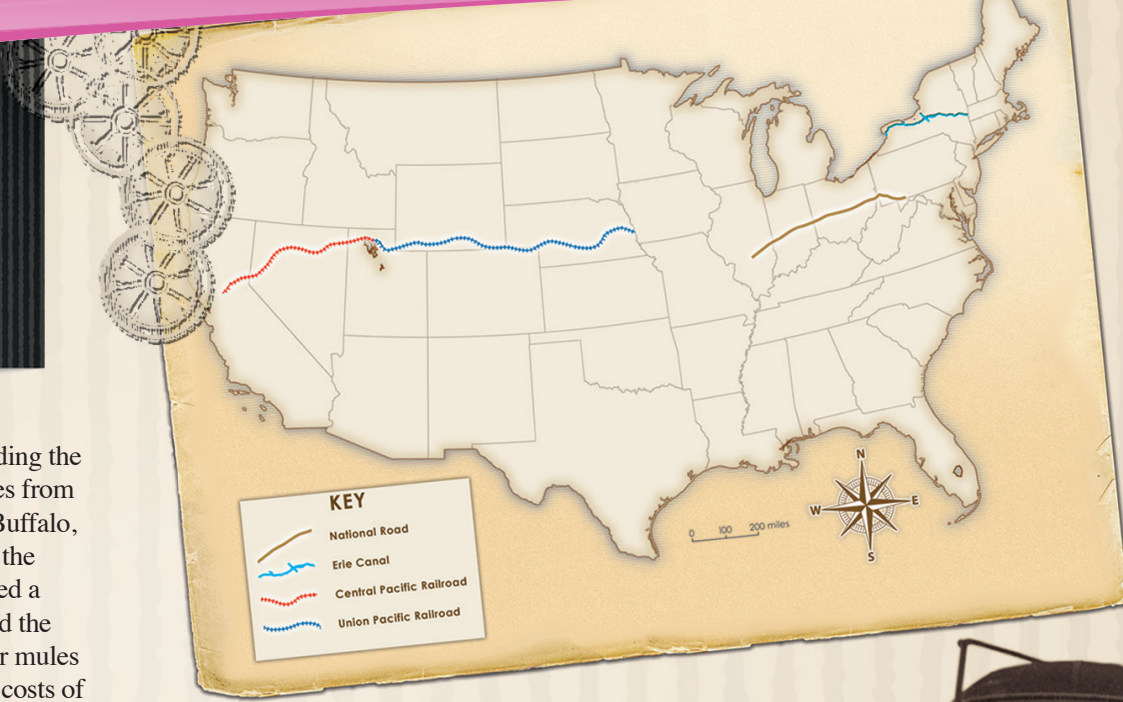
By 1811, the government ordered construction of the National Road to begin in Cumberland, Maryland. Workers eventually built the National Road through Maryland, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio and Indiana, and they ended it in Vandalia, Illinois, by 1839. The 620-mile road was one of the first interstate (between the states) highways the government ever built. The highway has made it possible for people and goods to move back and forth between the Eastern and Western United States.

The Erie Canal

In 1817, thousands of workers began building the Erie Canal. The huge ditch stretched 363 miles from Albany, New York, by the Hudson River, to Buffalo, New York, by Lake Erie. Workers completed the canal in October 1825. The new canal provided a direct water route between New York City and the Great Lakes. It was faster than using horses or mules to transport people and goods. Plus, it cut the costs of shipping by about 90%.

Before the canal was built, it cost \$100 to ship a ton of freight by wagon from Buffalo to New York City. On the Erie Canal, the price was just \$10 a ton. The canal took traffic away from the National road, and it brought more business to New York City. In fact, New York became the biggest seaport in the country. Other states began to build canals to link with the Erie Canal, and soon three more canals stretched across Indiana and Ohio.

After workers completed these canals, a frontier farmer could ship products all the way to the East in less time and for less money than ever before. For the first time, people could travel through the



KEY

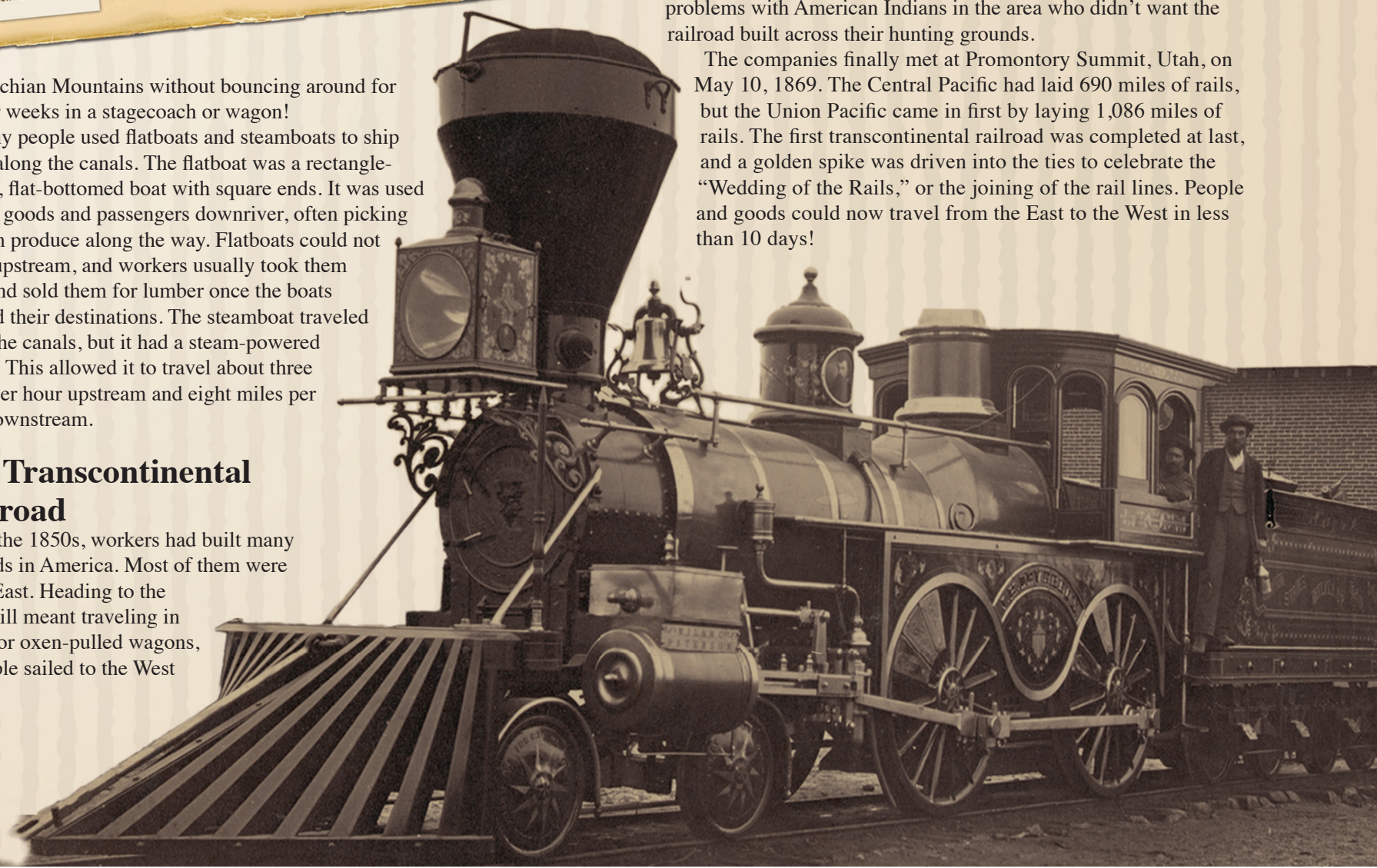
- National Road
- Erie Canal
- Central Pacific Railroad
- Union Pacific Railroad

Appalachian Mountains without bouncing around for days or weeks in a stagecoach or wagon!

Many people used flatboats and steamboats to ship goods along the canals. The flatboat was a rectangle-shaped, flat-bottomed boat with square ends. It was used to float goods and passengers downriver, often picking up farm produce along the way. Flatboats could not travel upstream, and workers usually took them apart and sold them for lumber once the boats reached their destinations. The steamboat traveled along the canals, but it had a steam-powered engine. This allowed it to travel about three miles per hour upstream and eight miles per hour downstream.

The Transcontinental Railroad

By the 1850s, workers had built many railroads in America. Most of them were in the East. Heading to the West still meant traveling in horse- or oxen-pulled wagons, or people sailed to the West



Inventiveness American Character

When the United States grew so large that transportation became too slow and too difficult, Americans used their inventiveness to solve the problem. Inventiveness is the ability to think of creative ways to do new things. It took inventiveness for Russell, Majors and Waddell to find a way to deliver the mail across the nation in less than 10 days. It took inventiveness for engineers to build the National Road across mountains and through forests. It took the inventiveness of great builders to design and dig the Erie Canal. It also took inventiveness to complete the very difficult task of building the transcontinental railroad across rivers, through mountain passes and over uneven ground. Thanks to the inventiveness of many great leaders, engineers and builders, amazing improvements in transportation made crossing this great country faster and easier than ever before.



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Trades & Technology

The Conestoga Wagon

The Conestoga wagon was a type of covered wagon used to carry freight and people from place to place. This was before faster types of transportation were invented. People first built this type of wagon in the Conestoga region of Pennsylvania in the early 1700s.

The Conestoga wagon had a curved wagon box that rose at both ends. Wagon makers did this so that when a wagon traveled up and down hills, its load would be less likely to shift and its tailgate wouldn’t have to bear as much strain. A wagon could carry up to five tons of freight, and usually six horses or oxen would pull it. It had a white canvas hood to protect the wagon box from dust, sun and rain. The Conestoga wagon was one of the most popular wagons used by the early pioneers traveling west.



What was the golden spike?

This Week's Question

The golden spike was a railroad spike made of gold. It was used to celebrate the completion of the transcontinental railroad at Promontory Summit, Utah, in 1869. The golden spike had the names of important railroad officials and the date engraved on its sides. The words “The Last Spike” were engraved on the top.

The golden spike was dropped into a pre-drilled hole as part of the ceremony marking the joining of the rails. Leland Stanford, president of the Central Pacific Railroad, and T.C. Durant, vice president of the Union Pacific Railroad, then drove an ordinary iron spike into the final railroad tie. When the two men took turns driving the spike into the tie, each missed on his first try. This made the railroad workers laugh and tease the men! When the final spike was driven in, a telegraph message shot out across the country. It simply said, “*Done.*”



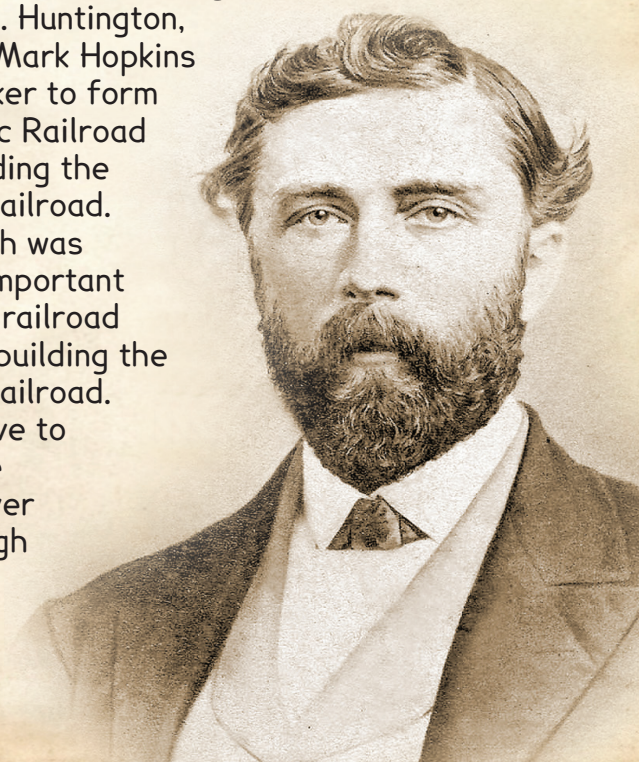
Biography

Theodore Judah

One of the great influences of the transcontinental railroad was a man named Theodore Judah. Trained as an engineer, Theodore worked on the Erie Canal and on several small railroads in the East. He also traveled to California where he helped build a railroad line from Sacramento to the gold fields in Folsom.

Railroad officials doubted that tracks could be built across the Sierra Nevada Mountains, but after working on the California line, Judah firmly believed it was possible. Judah eventually convinced Collis P. Huntington, Leland Stanford, Mark Hopkins and Charles Crocker to form the Central Pacific Railroad Co. and start building the transcontinental railroad.

Theodore Judah was one of the most important men in convincing railroad officials to begin building the transcontinental railroad. Sadly, he didn’t live to see it finished. He died of yellow fever after a trip through Panama in 1863.



Name _____

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- ACROSS
2. between the states

4. blanket-like leather bag used for carrying the mail

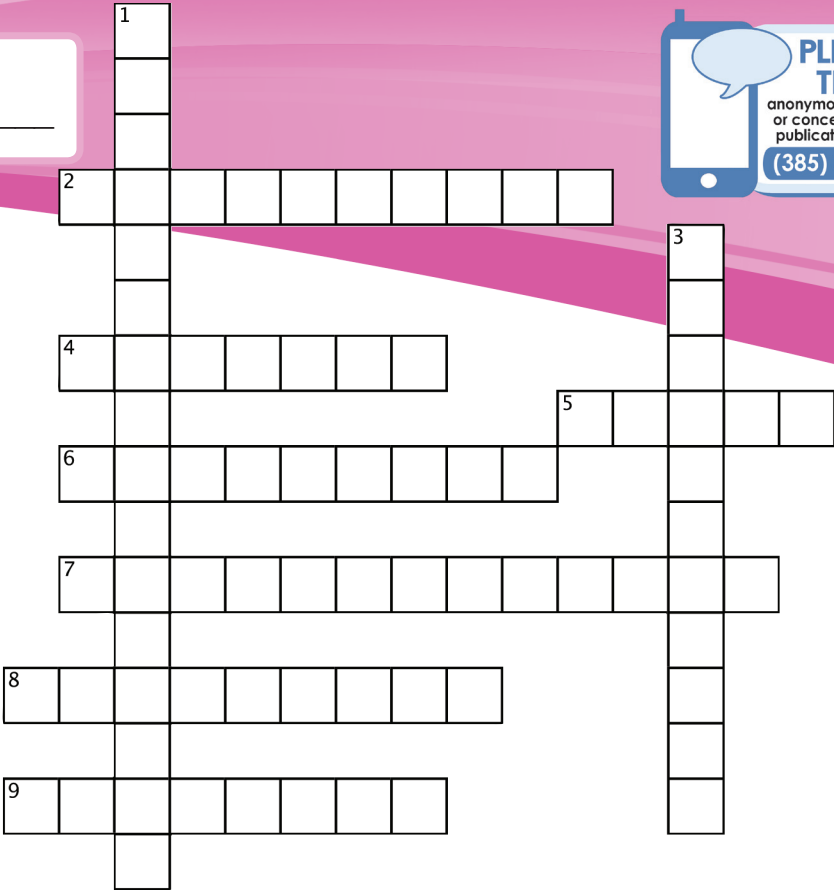
5. engineer who worked on the Erie Canal and several railroads: Theodore _____

6. riverboat with a steam-powered engine that could travel up- or downstream

7. the ability to think of creative ways to do new things
8. type of wagon used to carry freight and people from place to place

9. flat-bottomed boat used to float goods and passengers downriver
- DOWN
1. across the continent

3. railroad spike used in celebrating the "Wedding of the Rails"



All Aboard!

Activity

The map shows the railroad tracks laid by both the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific railroad companies. The Central Pacific tracks are shown in red and the Union Pacific tracks are shown in blue. Use the map to answer the following questions:

1. About how many miles of track were laid by the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific added together?

2. How many miles of track did the Union Pacific lay?

3. How many miles of track did the Central Pacific lay?

4. Which company laid more track?

5. About how many more miles of track did the winning company lay?

6. Why do you think the winning company was able to lay so much more track than the losing company? (Look back at Pages 2 and 3 of the newspaper for help with this question.)



Wanted: Pony Express Riders

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1
completed. Once it was finished, it was possible to send messages across the continent in a matter of minutes. The first telegram was sent to San Francisco on Oct. 24, 1861, and on Oct. 26, the Pony Express stopped making its runs. Today, the picture of a horse rider crossing the West is one symbol of the strength it took to ride headlong into the new frontier.

Think&Review

1. How did the Pony Express improve communication in America?

2. How long was the Pony Express mail service in business?

3. What was the name of the first interstate highway in America?

4. What were some of the benefits of using the Erie Canal for transportation?

5. Where did the Union Pacific begin building the transcontinental railroad? Which direction did it head?

6. Where did the Central Pacific begin building the transcontinental railroad? Which direction did it head?

7. How did the transcontinental railroad help improve transportation in America?

8. Who convinced the railroad officials that it was possible to build a railroad line across the Sierra Nevada Mountains?

9. Why did so many early pioneers choose the Conestoga wagon to take them west?

Did You Know?

The workers who built the transcontinental railroad loved to use slang terms to describe their work. Here are a few of the words they used, along with their definitions.

- hogger: engineer

fly light: someone who missed a meal

hay: worker who took a nap while on the job

flimsies: train schedules

gandy dancer: worker who laid track

This week, we have learned about some of the important improvements in transportation during the 1800s. Use your imagination to think of new ways to improve transportation and communication in the future. Using correct spelling and punctuation, describe new and creative ideas for moving people and things from place to place.

Let's Write

If you'd like to make any editorial comments about our paper, please write to us at support@studiesweekly.com.