

Westward Expansion Document Analysis

Source: National Archives and Records Administration, Teaching with Documents: The Homestead Act of 1862

. . . With the secession of Southern states from the Union and therefore removal of the slavery issue, finally, in 1862, the Homestead Act was passed and signed into law. The new law established a three-fold homestead acquisition process: filing an application, improving the land, and filing for deed of title. Any U.S. citizen, or intended citizen, who had never borne arms against the U.S. Government could file an application, improving the land and lay claim to 160 acres of surveyed Government land. For the next 5 years, the homesteader had to live on the land and improve it by building a 12-by-14 dwelling and growing crops. After 5 years, the homesteader could file for his patent (or deed of title) by submitting proof of residency and the required improvements to a local land office.

Local land offices forwarded the paperwork to the General Land Office in Washington, DC, along with a final certificate of eligibility. The case file was examined, and valid claims were granted patent to the land free and clear, except for a small registration fee. Title could also be acquired after a 6-month residency and trivial improvements, provided the claimant paid the government \$1.25 per acre. After the Civil War, Union soldiers could deduct the time they served from the residency requirements. .

1. According to this document, how did the Homestead Act encourage the settlement of the West?
2. How did this piece of legislation impact the United States economy?

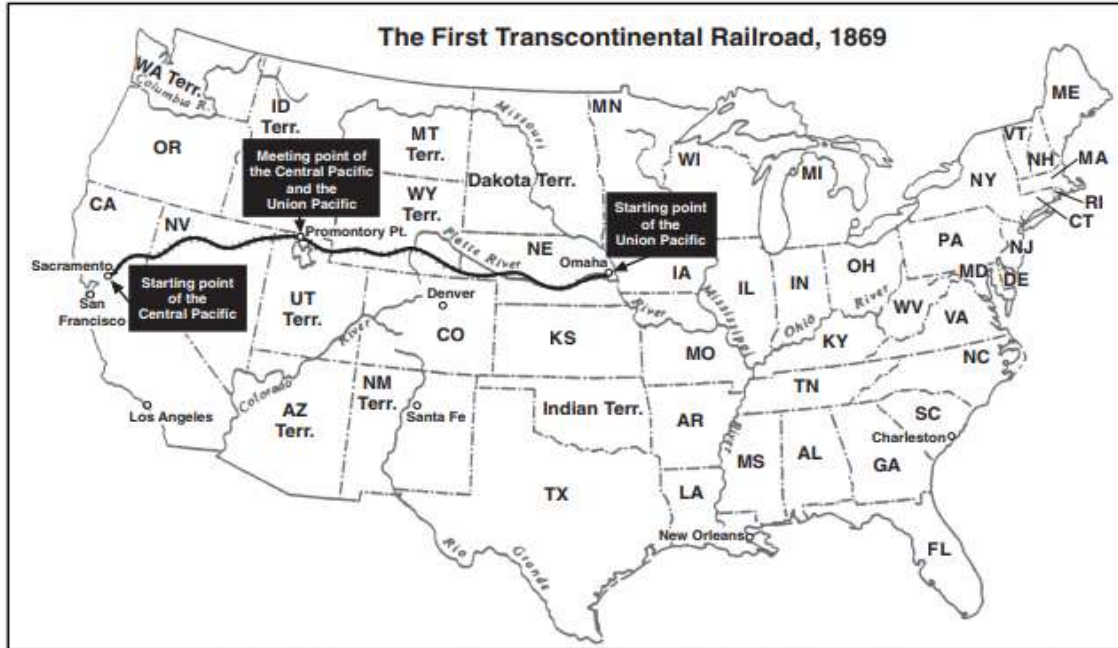
Source: The Pacific Railroad Act, July 1, 1862

. . . Sec.2. And be it further enacted, That the right of way through the public lands be, and the same is hereby, granted to said company [The Union Pacific Railroad Company] for the construction of said railroad and telegraph line; and the right, power, and authority is hereby given to said company to take from the public lands adjacent to the line of said road, earth, stone, timber, and other materials for the construction thereof; said right of way is granted to said railroad to the extent of two hundred feet in width on each side of said railroad where it may pass over the public lands, including all necessary grounds for stations, buildings, workshops, and depots, machine shops, switches, side tracks, turntables, and water stations. The United States shall extinguish as rapidly as may be, the Indian titles to all lands falling under the operation of this act and required for the said right of way and grants hereinafter made.

Sec.3. And be it further enacted, That there be, and is hereby, granted to the said company, for the purpose of aiding in the construction of said railroad and telegraph line, and to secure the safe and speedy transportation of the mails, troops, munitions of war, and public stores thereon, every alternate section of public land, designated by odd numbers, to the amount of five alternate sections per mile on each side of said railroad, on the line thereof, and within the limits of ten miles on each side of said road, not sold, reserved, or otherwise disposed of by the United States, and to which a preemption or homestead claim may not have attached, at the time the line of said road is definitely fixed: Provided, That all mineral lands shall be excepted from the operation of this act; but where the same shall contain

timber, the timber thereon is hereby granted to said company. And all such lands, so granted by this section, which shall not be sold or disposed of by said company within three years after the entire road shall have been completed, shall be subject to settlement and preëmption, like other lands, at a price not exceeding one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre, to be paid to said company. . . .

3. According to this document, what did the federal government give the Union Pacific Railroad Company to help them construct the railroad and the telegraph line?
4. How did the United States economy benefit from this piece of legislation?



Source: James F. Silver, *American History Activities*, Center for Applied Research in Education (adapted)

5. According to this map, how did the completion of the first transcontinental railroad benefit economic growth in the United States?

Population of Western Cities

City	1860	1890
Denver	2,603	106,713
Omaha	1,883	140,452
Portland	2,874	46,385
San Francisco	56,802	298,997

Source: Population Abstract of the United States (from *Creating America*, McDougal Littell)

6. What does this chart show about the effect of the transcontinental railroad on the population of western cities?

Source: Lorna Mason et al., *America's Past and Promise*, McDougal Littell

From the West, the railroads carried eastward such raw materials as lumber, minerals, livestock, and grain. In midwestern cities like St. Louis, Chicago, Minneapolis, and Cleveland, the raw materials were processed. Grain was milled into flour. Hogs became bacon and hams. Cattle became beef. Iron ore was converted into steel. Lumber was cut into wood for housing. The processed goods were shipped by rail to eastern cities. From eastern cities, in turn, came manufactured goods, which were sold to westerners.

7. Based on this passage, state two ways the railroads influenced economic growth in the United States.

Directions: Review the five (5) photos from the Homestead Act Photos document and use them to answer the questions below.

8. What does each photograph suggest about what life was like for homesteaders on the Great Plains in the 1880s?

Document A:

Document B:

Document C:

Document D:

Document E:

9. What other evidence might you want to examine if you wanted to determine whether these photographs were accurate representations of life in the tenements?

When evaluating whether a historical photograph is useful as evidence, historians consider various questions, including:

- When and where was the photograph taken?
- Who took the photograph? What was their perspective on the events or people being photographed, and how might that have influenced what they chose to shoot?
- Why was the photograph taken? Might the photographer have wanted to portray a scene in a particular way?
- Under what circumstances was the photograph taken? How might these circumstances have limited or enabled what the photographer captured?
- What technology did the photographer use, and how might that have influenced the image created?

10. Considering the questions above, why might Butcher's photographs be useful evidence about life for homesteaders on the Great Plains?