AWESOME stories

TRAINS GO WEST

As train-travel increased, on America's new transcontinental railroad, the engines were often referred to as an "iron horse."

It was 1872, three years after the transcontinental railroad was completed, when America took its ninth census. Data reveals that westward expansion was already changing the country.

St. Louis (a Missouri city with a pivotal location and known as "Gateway to the West") had already become one of the wealthiest areas in the United States.

North of that town, the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers converge. Just west of town, vast and open territories beckoned new Americans (like the Irish who, following the Great Hunger in their country, fled to the United States).

Once the rail line was completed, settlers moving west were no longer limited to river or overland travel. They could - and did - depend on steam engines. In 1800, nineteen years before he died, Oliver Evans (an important American inventor born in Delaware in 1755) had predicted that would happen:

> *The time will come when people will travel in stages moved by steam engines from one city to another, almost as fast as birds can fly, 15 or 20 miles an hour.... A carriage will start from Washington in the morning, the passengers will breakfast at Baltimore, dine at Philadelphia, and sup in New York the same day.... Engines will drive boats 10 or 12 miles an hour, and there will be hundreds of steamers running on the Mississippi, as predicted years ago.*

What did trains (and their power sources) look like during the early years of the transcontinental railroad?

- A locomotive manufactured by Baldwin in 1872, and operated by Virginia and Truckee (V&T) Railroad, moved freight, plowed snow and pulled private cars.

- The V&T was quite a sight in its heyday.

- Joe Douglas, of the Dayton, Sutro & Carson Valley Railroad, was heavily used at Gold Canyon between 1882 and 1896.

- From the shape of its smoke stack, we can tell that this V&T engine (pictured in 1885) probably burned wood instead of coal. (A coal-burning locomotive had a straight stack.)

- In July of 1898, a locomotive stoped near Lake Tahoe's east shore so its passengers could pose for pictures.

The tracks and trains of America's transcontinental system had changed from:

- 1630, when Beaumont first built heavy-plank wooden roads on which horses pulled carts and wagons to and from English coal mines;

• 1758, when Middleton (in Britain) first established a railroad;

• 1774, when James Watt (a Scotsman for whom the electrical unit of power is named) invented the first stationary steam engine;

• 1807, when Mumbles Railway (in Swansea, Wales) first carried railroad passengers;

• 1829, when George Stephenson and his assistants revealed "The Rocket" - a locomotive engine able to reach a previously unheard-of speed: 24 miles per hour; and

• 1831, when the "John Bull" locomotive arrived in Philadelphia (after a six-week voyage across the Atlantic) from Liverpool. In 1981 - during its 150th anniversary year - the old John Bull ran one more time (to the delight of everyone who witnessed it).

The people who packed up their belongings and headed west also changed the face of America. Thanks to the U.S. National Archives, we can meet some of them.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
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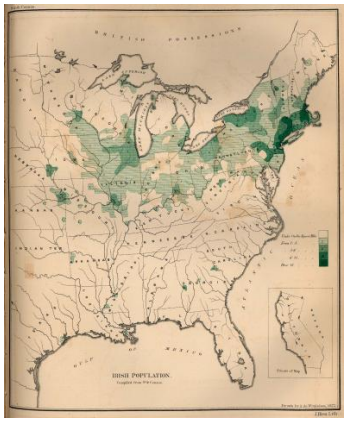
Media Stream



Map Depicting the Irish Population
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Baldwin Locomotive
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V & T Railroad Photo
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Joe Douglas Locomotive

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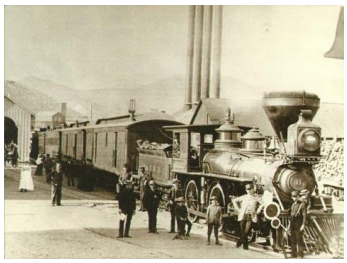

Wood-Burning Locomotive Engine

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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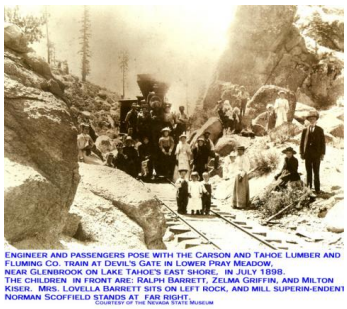

Photo of Railroad Passengers Near Lake Tahoe

Courtesy of the Nevada State Museum, the image is online courtesy the Library of Congress.

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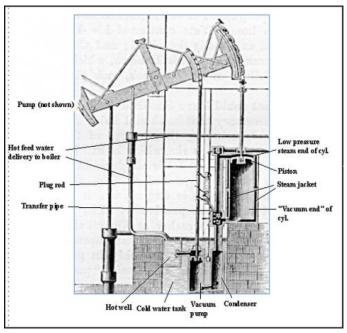

First Stationary Steam Engine - Invented by James Watt

Image published in *History of the Growth of the Steam Engine*, by Robert H. Thurston, published by D. Appleton & Co (in 1878). Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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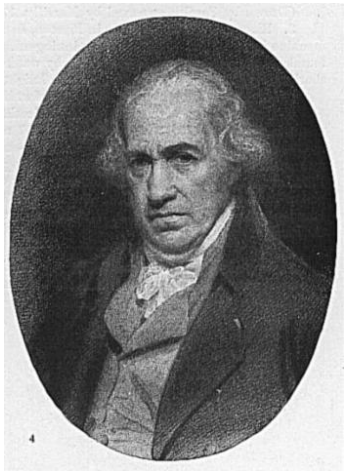

James Watt

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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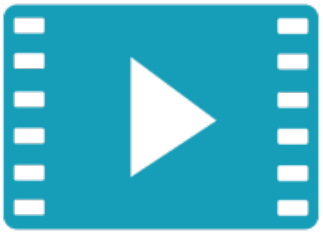

John Bull Locomotive - Final Run

Clip from the Smithsonian, online courtesy YouTube.

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