

Chinese & White Wages on CP

Beyond the Mississippi by Albert D. Richardson

The cars now (1867) run nearly to the summit of the Sierras. ... four thousand laborers were at work—one-tenth Irish, the rest Chinese. They were a great army laying siege to Nature in her strongest citadel. The rugged mountains looked like stupendous ant-hills. They swarmed with Celestials, shoveling, wheeling, carting, drilling and blasting rocks and earth, while their dull, moony eyes stared out from under immense basket-hats, like umbrellas. At several dining camps we saw hundreds sitting on the ground, eating soft boiled rice with chopsticks as fast as terrestrials could with soup-ladles. *Irish laborers received thirty dollars per month (gold) and board; Chinese, thirty-one dollars, boarding themselves.* After a little experience the latter were quite as efficient and far less troublesome.

Testimony of J. H. Strobridge, US Pacific Railway Commission, pp 3139-41, as printed in Stuart Daggett: *Chapters in the History of the Southern Pacific*, p 70n.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>Rate of Pay</u>	<u>White Workers</u>	<u>Rate of Pay</u>
1864	Very few	-	1,200	\$30 a month
1865	7,000	\$30 a month	2,500	\$35 a month
1866	11,000	\$35 a month	2,500 - 3,000	\$35 a month
1867	11,000	\$35 a month	2,500 – 3,000	-
1868	5,000 – 6,000	-	2,500 – 3,000	-
1869	5,000	-	1,500 – 1,600	-

Note that across Nevada the Central Pacific also employed the local Indians, not reflected in the above chart.

Central Pacific Railroad Statement Made to the President of the United States, and Secretary of the Interior, on the Progress of the Work. October 10th, 1865. H.S. Crocker & Co., Printers, 92 J Street, Sacramento.

CHINESE LABOR.

A large majority of the white laboring class on the Pacific Coast find more profitable and congenial employment in mining and agricultural pursuits, than in railroad work. The greater portion of the laborers employed by us are Chinese, who constitute a large element in the population of California. Without them it would be impossible to complete the western portion of this great national enterprise, within the time required by the Acts of Congress.

As a class they are quiet, peaceable, patient, industrious and economical—ready and apt to learn all the different kinds of work required in railroad building, they soon become as efficient as white laborers. More prudent and economical, they are contented with less wages. We find them organized into societies for mutual aid and assistance. These societies, that count their numbers by thousands, are conducted by shrewd, intelligent business men, who promptly advise their subordinates where employment can be found on the most favorable terms.

No system similar to slavery, serfdom or peonage prevails among these laborers. Their wages, which are always paid in coin, at the end of each month, are divided among them by their agents, who attend to their business, in proportion to the labor done by each person. These agents are generally American or Chinese merchants, who furnish them their supplies of food, the value of which they deduct from their monthly pay. We have assurances from leading Chinese merchants, that under the just and liberal policy pursued by the Company, it will be able to procure during the next year, not less than 15,000 laborers. With this large force, the Company will be able to push on the work so as not only to complete it far within the time required by the Acts of Congress, but so as to meet the public impatience.

LELAND STANFORD
Pres't C. P. R. R. Co.

—*Alta California*, San Francisco, November 9, 1868.

“Systematic workers these Chinese – competent and wonderfully effective because tireless and unremitting in their industry. Order and industry then, as now, made for accomplishment. Divided into gangs of about 30 men each, they work under the direction of an American foreman. The Chinese board themselves. One of their number is selected in each gang to receive all wages and buy all provisions. They usually pay an American clerk – \$1 a month apiece is usual – to see that each gets all he earned and is charged no more than his share of the living expenses. *They are paid from \$30 to \$35 in gold a month, out of which they board themselves.* They are credited with having saved about \$20 a month. Their workday is from sunrise to sunset, six days in the week. They spend Sunday washing and mending, gambling and smoking, and frequently, old timers will testify, in shrill-toned quarreling. ...”

Chinese Work & Pay – 1868

San Francisco *Alta California*, November 9, 1868

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Courtesy Kyle Wyatt, CSRM

Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum

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