



Mining and Railroads

Objectives

1. Explain how the discovery of gold and silver affected the West.
2. Describe life in the western mining towns.
3. Summarize how railroads spread and helped the West to develop.

Main Idea

Settlement of the West often came in a rush, but many boomtowns soon died out.



Use Definition Clues

What is a lode? Write the sentence that provides a definition.

Prepare to Read

Reading Skill

Use Definition Clues As you read about history, you will come across unfamiliar words. In this textbook, definitions for many unfamiliar words are included in the text that surrounds the word. When you read a word that you do not know, look at nearby sentences. The unfamiliar word may be repeated and defined.

Vocabulary Builder

High-Use Words

immigrate, p. 581

manual, p. 581

Key Terms

vigilante, p. 580

subsidiy, p. 580

transcontinental railroad, p. 581

★ **Background Knowledge** With the Civil War over, the nation turned its attention to its western frontier. This stretched from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. The frontier had prairies, mountains, and forests. Even though Americans thought of it as unsettled, it was the home of Mexican settlers and Native Americans.

Moving west, settlers first crossed the Great Plains. Most of the Plains receives little rainfall and has few trees. Thinking that crops could not grow there, settlers called the area the Great American Desert. In this section, you will learn how railroad builders and miners made the West a vital part of the nation's economy.

Boom and Bust

In many parts of the West, settlement came in a rush. This was especially true in areas where prospectors found gold or silver. New mining towns sprang up in a flash—but many did not last long.

The gold rush of 1849 in California excited the nation. Before long, miners spread from California to the Sierra Nevada and the Rocky Mountains and to the Black Hills of the Dakota Territory.

The Comstock Lode Just before the Civil War, prospectors began searching for gold in the Sierra Nevada. In 1859, two Irish prospectors found the gold they were looking for. However, a third man, Henry Comstock, said the claim was on his land. The find became known as the Comstock Lode. A lode is a rich vein of ore.

At the Comstock Lode, a blue-tinted sand stuck to all the equipment and made the gold hard to dig out. The blue mud turned out to be loaded with silver. In fact, the silver was far more valuable than the gold. This was one of the richest silver mines in the world.

In the next 20 years, the Comstock Lode produced \$300 million worth of silver and made Nevada a center of mining. A tent city near the mines grew into the boomtown of Virginia City, Nevada.

The Boom Spreads After the Civil War, prospectors fanned out over the West. They found valuable ores in Montana, Idaho, and Colorado. They made a gold strike in South Dakota's Black Hills. In the 1890s, a gold find drew people from all over the world to Alaska.

Although each strike caused great excitement, few prospectors got rich. The ore was deep underground and expensive to extract. Comstock gave up and sold his mining rights for \$11,000 and two mules. Many other prospectors sold their claims to large mining companies. By the 1880s, western mining had become a big business.

Boomtown Life Tent cities like Virginia City often arose around the diggings. Soon hotels, stores, and other wood-frame buildings appeared. Mining camps quickly grew into boomtowns.

Where prospectors went, others followed. Merchants brought mule teams hauling tools, food, and clothing. Nothing was cheap in the boomtown stores. Sometimes, miners paid high prices for bottles of pure drinking water. They did not want to drink from streams that might be polluted with chemicals, like arsenic, used in mining.

Women who joined the mining boom could make a good living. Some opened restaurants. Others washed clothes or took in boarders. One woman just baked pies. In a year, she became quite wealthy.

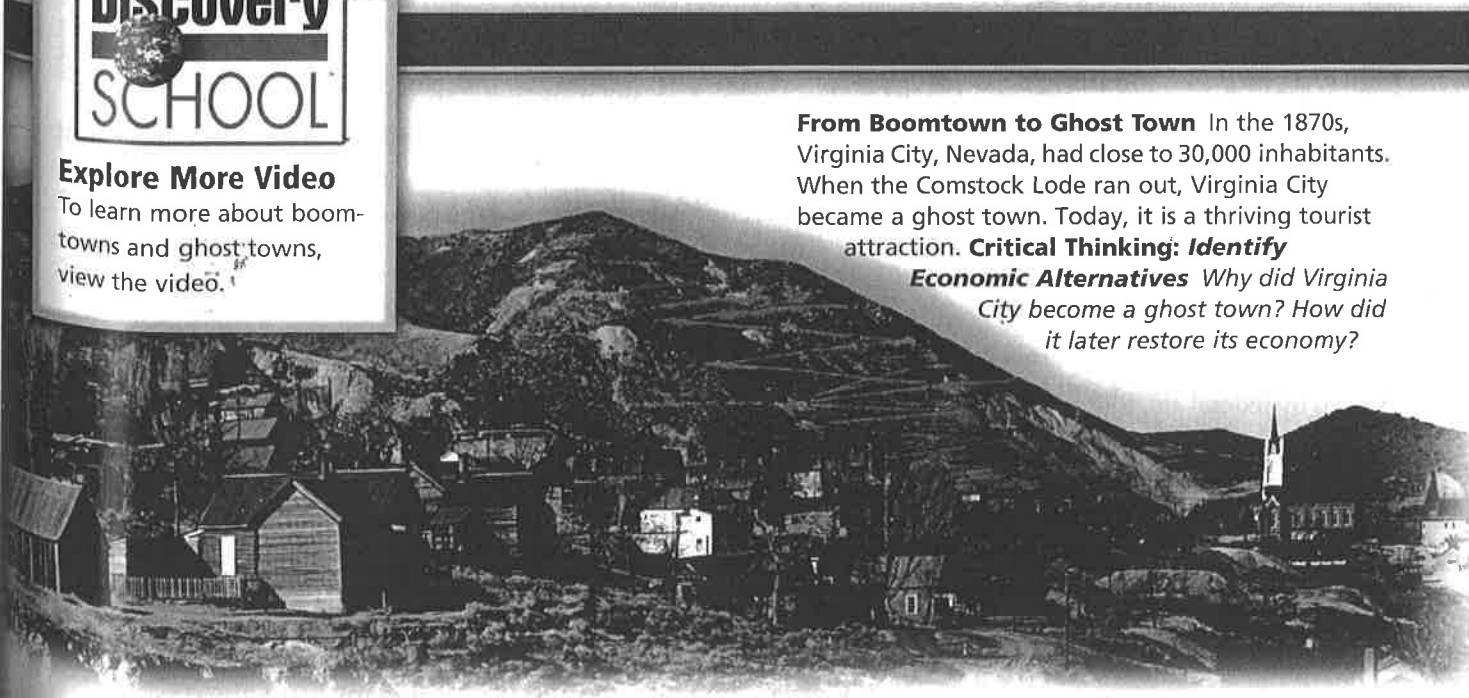
Nearly half the miners were foreign-born. The streets of the mining towns rang with Irish accents as well as Italian, German, Spanish, Chinese, and other languages. The foreign miners often faced hostility. For example, laws restricted Chinese miners to claims abandoned by others. Mobs often drove the Chinese from towns.



Explore More Video
To learn more about boomtowns and ghost towns, view the video.

From Boomtown to Ghost Town In the 1870s, Virginia City, Nevada, had close to 30,000 inhabitants. When the Comstock Lode ran out, Virginia City became a ghost town. Today, it is a thriving tourist attraction. **Critical Thinking: Identify**

Economic Alternatives Why did Virginia City become a ghost town? How did it later restore its economy?



Mining and Railroads in the West

MAP MASTER

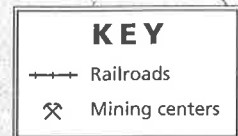
Skills Activity

Wherever prospectors discovered gold or silver, mines sprang up and people poured in. Railroads spread out to serve the new communities.

- (a) **Read a Map** What railroad served Bozeman and Butte in Montana?
- (b) **Draw Conclusions** Why were railroads eager to serve the new mining centers?

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Frontier Justice Mining towns sprouted so fast that law and order were hard to find. Miners formed groups of **vigilantes**, or self-appointed law keepers. Such groups hunted down bandits and imposed their own rough brands of justice.

As boomtowns grew, local residents began to seek more lasting forms of government. Sheriffs, marshals, and judges replaced vigilantes. Colorado, Dakota, and Nevada organized into territories in 1861, followed by Arizona and Idaho in 1863 and Montana in 1864.

In some mining towns, all the ore was soon extracted. Mines shut down and miners moved away. With few customers, businesses failed and merchants left. Boomtowns became ghost towns.

Checkpoint Why did boomtowns use vigilante justice?

Main Idea

Backed by federal aid, railroad companies had laid tracks from coast to coast by 1869.

The Railroad Boom

Railroads raced to lay track to the mines and boomtowns. They received generous help from the federal government.

Aid to Railroads Before 1860, railroad lines ended at the Mississippi River. Then, the federal government began to offer subsidies. **Subsidies** are grants of land or money. For every mile of track, the government gave the railroad 10 square miles of land next to the track. Railroads got more than 180 million acres, an area the size of Texas. They also received federal loans.

Spanning the Continent Many westerners dreamed of a transcontinental railroad, a railroad line that spanned the continent. In 1862, Leland Stanford and his partners won the right to build a line eastward from Sacramento. Their railroad was the Central Pacific. Another railroad, the Union Pacific, would build west from Omaha. When the lines met, tracks would stretch from coast to coast.

The railroads hired thousands of workers—native-born whites, Mexican Americans, and African Americans. Workers also immigrated to the United States from Mexico and Ireland. The Central Pacific brought 10,000 Chinese to the United States.

The work was hazardous; the pay low. Cutting through the Sierra Nevada, Chinese manual laborers were lashed by snow and winds. Avalanches buried weeks of work in moments and killed workers by the score. Daily progress sometimes came in inches. (For more on the building of the railroad, see the Geography and History feature.)

At last, on May 10, 1869, the two lines met at Promontory, Utah. Stanford drove the final spike into the last rail with a silver mallet.

Effects of the Railroads New towns sprang up in the West. People and supplies poured in. Gold and silver poured out.

Rapid population growth brought political changes. Nevada became a state in 1864; Colorado in 1876; North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Washington in 1889; Idaho and Wyoming in 1890.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did the railroads change the West?

★ **Looking Back and Ahead** Gold and silver discoveries brought boomtowns to the West. Then came railroads and more settlers. In the next section, you will read how these developments affected the Native Americans who lived in the West.

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Comprehension and Critical Thinking

- (a) Recall** In 1850, what region of the United States was considered the western frontier?

(b) Detect Points of View Explain how each of the following groups viewed the western frontier: Americans, Spanish settlers, Native Americans.
- (a) Identify** Why did the government believe it was important to extend railroad lines west?

(b) Identify Economic Benefits What incentives did the government offer to railroad builders to extend railroad lines westward?

Reading Skill

- 3. Use Definition Clues** Define the term subsidies in the following context, and describe the clue you used: Congress offered generous subsidies to railroads. Subsidies are grants of land or money.

Vocabulary Builder

Read each sentence. If the sentence is true, write YES. If the sentence is not true, write NO and explain why.

- 4.** Vigilante groups in the West were replaced by homesteaders.

5. The transcontinental railroad connected the East with the West.

Writing

- 6.** Persuasive writing always centers on an opinion—an idea about which there can be disagreement. Tell whether each of the following statements expresses an opinion or states a fact. **Statements:**

 - (a)** A valuable gold strike was made in South Dakota's Black Hills.
 - (b)** The unjust treatment of foreign miners was shameful.
 - (c)** Creating a coast-to-coast railway was the most important factor in U.S. economic history.
 - (d)** Some mining camps quickly grew into boomtowns.