



The story of America's first transcontinental railroad is legend. In 1853, Congress authorized surveys of potential routes for the "Pacific Railroad," which were completed in 1855 and identified a Northern Pacific, a Central Pacific, and two Southern Pacific routes. The 1862 Pacific Railway Act chose the Central Pacific route due to gold in northern California, silver in northern Nevada, and the absence of Southern Congressmen -- due to the Civil War -- to advocate for a Southern Pacific route, which would have been a much easier build. The Act specified two railroad charters: the Union Pacific Railroad would build railroad and telegraph lines west from the eastern shores of the Missouri River at Council Bluffs, Iowa, and would meet the Central Pacific Railroad and telegraph line built eastward from the navigable waters of the Sacramento River in California. On January 8, 1863, grading for the CP commenced at "K" Street at the waterfront of the Sacramento River and the first rails were laid later that year. The CP crossing of the Sierra Nevada required 15 tunnels, the most difficult being the summit tunnel at Donner Pass, and other engineering feats. The first train passed through the Donner Pass summit tunnel on June 18, 1868, and thanks to advance work, the first train arrived in Reno the next day. From Reno, the CP had relatively clear sailing as it wound its way around the normal-fault mountain ranges and across the flat alluvial valleys of northern Nevada, including this location at Golconda, Nevada, and then through northwest Utah to meet the UP on May 10, 1869, at Promontory Summit, Utah, henceforth binding the nation. The CP was absorbed into the Southern Pacific over time, starting with a lease in 1885 and finally a full merger in 1959, and in 1996 the SP was absorbed into the UP.

In 1909, the Western Pacific Railroad's Feather River Route was completed between Oakland, California, and Salt Lake City, Utah, via Beckwourth Pass, to compete with the SP's (original Central Pacific [1869]) route over Donner Pass. While significantly longer and more difficult to build, the WP's crossing of the Pacific Crest at Beckwourth Pass is about 2,000 feet lower than the SP/CP Donner Pass Route (elevation about 7,000 feet). The engineering key to the WP's Feather River Route was a crossing from the North Fork Feather River watershed to the Middle Fork watershed -- to avoid the lower part of the Middle Fork -- at a location called Spring Garden, which required the longest tunnel on the route as well as a loop. Once over Beckwourth Pass the WP, like the CP 40 years earlier, had relatively clear sailing across northern Nevada and into Utah.

Golconda was a landmark on the California Emigrant Trail because of hot springs on the Humboldt River. In 1866, Golconda became the center of activity for mining in the nearby Gold Run District, but mining was already declining when the CP tracks reached Golconda in October 1868. Over the next three decades, sporadic mine production was shipped out on the CP, most notably in 1888-1889, when there was brief activity centered on the Adelaide mine located about 10 miles south of Golconda and the CP. In 1896, a Scotch group organized the Glasgow & Western Exploration Company, which purchased the old Adelaide mine and built a smelter on the north site of the CP (1869) at Golconda. Golconda boomed and in 1898 the G&WEC commenced construction of a 12-mile, narrow gauge railroad -- the Golconda & Adelaide Railroad -- to connect its namesake locales. The line was completed to Adelaide in January 1899. The mine immediately played out and the G&WEC's mine, smelter, and railroad closed in June 1900, only 17 months after the G&A was built. The smelter was modernized and mining resumed in 1907; the G&A operated for 3 years before being permanently shut down in 1910. In 1914, the G&A (1899n) rails were salvaged for use on the Nevada Short Line (1915n).

Northward view of the CP (1869) in the foreground, the WP (1909) with a line of cars in the distance, and the foundations of the G&WEC's smelter in Golconda between the two lines. The G&A (1899n) crossed the CP/SP tracks to the smelter, but any evidence of the G&A grade is gone. The road just beyond the tracks is Stanford Street and south of the tracks is Crocker Street -- half of the Big Four are commemorated in Golconda.