

# Leland Stanford

1824–1893



**WHY HE MADE HISTORY** Leland Stanford was one of the “Big Four” responsible for the construction of the Central Pacific railroad. He served as governor of California and later founded Stanford University.



*As you read the biography below, think about how Leland Stanford’s influence ensured the completion of the Central Pacific railroad.*



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Leland Stanford was born to a wealthy family in Watervliet, New York, in 1824. After several years of school, Stanford became an attorney in 1848 and moved to Wisconsin. Three years later, he and his wife moved to California, a place where many people, including Stanford’s brothers, had found wealth and success.

In 1852 Stanford began working with his brothers and made a fortune by supplying miners with equipment. The mining boom had exploded in California and Stanford profited greatly.

Stanford became involved in politics in 1857. His first successful election was as governor of California in 1861. It was in this role that Stanford was able to contribute to his dream of building the western part of the transcontinental railroad.

Along with Mark Hopkins, Charles Crocker, and Collis Huntington, Stanford was one of the “Big Four” partnership that was formed to see that the railroad was built. As governor, Stanford was able to provide one of the most important parts of the project—finances. He made sure that public funds and land grants were used for the building of the railroad.

## VOCABULARY

**endowment** a gift

In 1862 Stanford's Central Pacific Company started in Sacramento, California, and began building railroad track eastward. The Union Pacific Company began work in Omaha, Nebraska, and headed west. The transcontinental railroad was completed when the two companies met at Promontory, Utah, in 1869.

When Stanford's term as governor ended in 1863, he left politics to become president of the Central Pacific Company. He also had large investments in the Southern Pacific Company railroad and was president of that company, too. Stanford accumulated more wealth as owner of several construction companies that were hired to build railroads.

In 1884, the death of his 15-year-old son to typhoid fever inspired Stanford and his wife to found Stanford University. The Stanfords provided land for the school and an **endowment** of more than \$20 million. Today, Stanford is one of the finest universities in the nation.

The following year, he was elected to the U.S. Senate. He remained a senator and president of Central Pacific until his death in 1893.

### WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

**1. Draw Conclusions** Why do you think the Central Pacific railroad was so important?

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**2. Expressing and Supporting a Point of View** How do you think the people of California felt about public money being used to fund the railroad? Provide reasons or examples to support your point of view.

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### ACTIVITY

**3.** Learn more about the Central Pacific railroad. Draw a map of the railroad's path across the country and mark different cities where the train stopped.