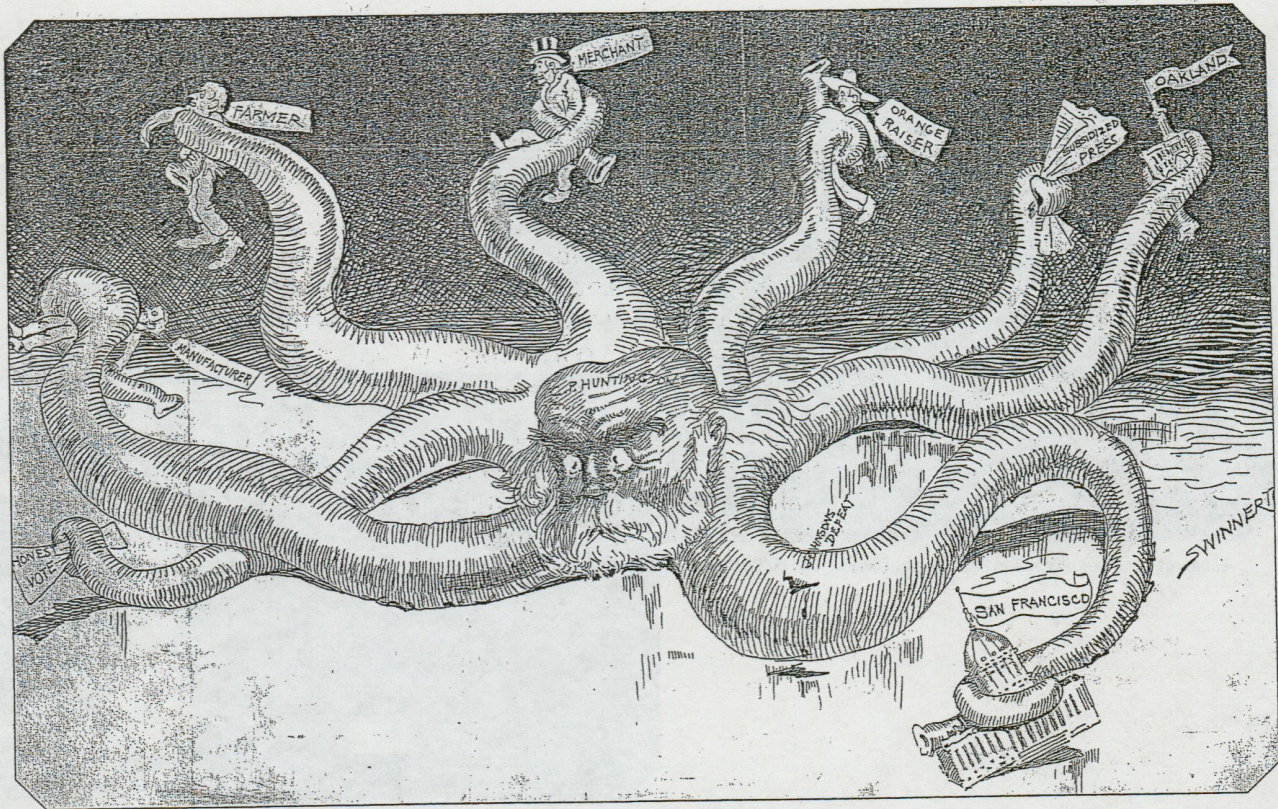


Visual Primary Source Document 1



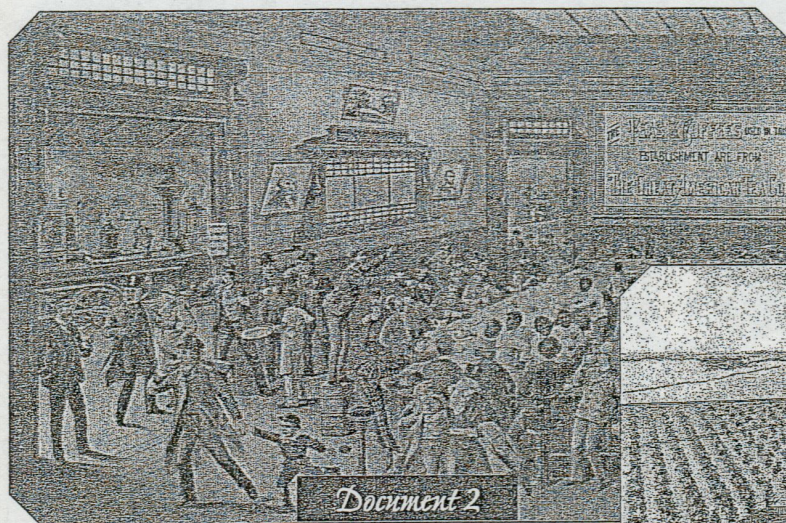
Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California

Information on Document 1

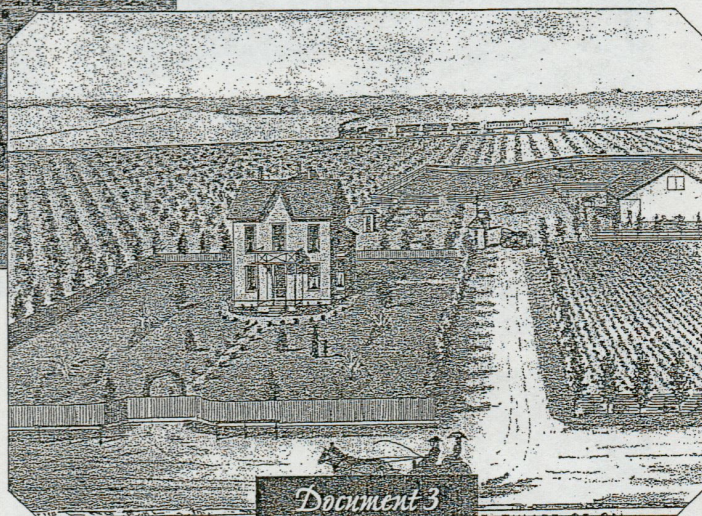
This 1896 cartoon in the *San Francisco Examiner* shows Collis Huntington as a huge octopus. Huntington was president of the powerful Southern Pacific Railroad. In 1868, the four top owners of the Central Pacific Railroad (including Huntington) acquired the Southern Pacific. They expanded this railroad by purchasing other lines and linking them up to create a huge transcontinental network. In time, this system connected New Orleans and other southern cities to various points throughout the West Coast.

Like other large lines, the Southern Pacific received millions of free acres of public land which it could sell to help pay for its growth and to settle future customers along its routes. Critics said the railroad often dealt harshly with farmers who bought or settled on its lands. Frank Norris's novel *The Octopus: A California Story* is a fictional account of one episode in which this sort of conflict led to violence — though not all historians agree that the railroad deserved all the blame for this incident.

Visual Primary Source Documents 2 & 3



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-42946



Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California

Information on Documents 2 & 3

Document 2 is a print titled "Ten Minutes for Refreshments." It shows a huge crowd in a restaurant in a large railroad station. The print is undated, but it was done sometime in the late 1800s. (Portraits of Washington and Lincoln are on the wall.)

Document 3 is of a farm house next to the Southern Pacific Railroad's line in the San Joaquin Valley in Tulare County, California. It illustrates the sort of small-scale family farming that the railroad claimed its land-grant and settlement policies fostered.

Written Primary Source Documents 1 & 2

Information on Documents 1 & 2

Document 1 is a passage from "The American Railroad," by Lyman Abbott in *Harper's Magazine*, Volume 49, Issue 291, August 1874, pp. 375-394.

Document 2 is part of a letter Frithjof Meidell, an immigrant worker from Norway, wrote to his mother in 1855. Archives of America, vol. 8, pp. 349-53.

• Document 1 •

The traveler going West steps to the ticket office of the Pennsylvania, the Erie, or the New York Central Railroad. He purchases his ticket for San Francisco. He gives his trunk to a baggage-master, gets for it a little piece of metal, and sees and cares for it no more. A porter shows him to his place in the Pullman car. He takes his seat, pulls off his boots, puts on his slippers, opens his bag, takes out his *Harper's Magazine*, and his traveling cares are at an end. For six days and nights he is rolled swiftly across the continent. Engineers and conductors change. He is passed along from one railroad corporation to another. At night his seat becomes a bed, and he sleeps as quietly, or nearly so, as if in his own bed at home. He traverses broad plains, passes over immense viaducts, whirls swiftly over mountain torrents on iron bridges, climbs or pierces mountains; but he never leaves his parlor; if need be, his meals are brought to him where he sits; and at length, after a week of luxurious though weary traveling, in which he has been in the keeping of half a dozen different companies, and has traversed over three thousand miles of country, he is set down in the station at San Francisco.... His little piece of brass is given to an express agent or a hackman, and when he reaches his hotel, the trunk which he surrendered in New York is in the great hall awaiting him.

• Document 2 •

Dear Mother:

How is the railroad getting along? Here in America it is the railroads that build up the whole country. Because of them the farmers get wider markets and higher prices for their products. They seem to put new life into everything. Even the old apply woman sets off at a dogtrot when she hears that whistle to sell her apples to the passengers. Every ten miles along the railways there are stations, which soon grow up into towns. "Soon," did I say? I should have said "immediately," because it is really remarkable how rapidly the stations are transformed into little towns.

Written Primary Source Documents 3 & 4

Information on Documents 3 & 4

Document 3 is part of a short comment titled "Agriculture and the Railroad Interest," in the journal *Manufacturer and Builder*, Volume 5, Issue 8, August 1873.

Document 4 is a passage from an article by Richard T. Ely titled "The Economic Evils in American Railway Methods," in *Harper's Magazine*, Volume 73, Issue 435, August 1886, pp. 375-394. Ely was one of the best-known economists of his day. He was a firm advocate of reform and greater government regulation of the economy.

• Document 3 •

It is self-evident that the railroad interest is greatly indebted to the agricultural business, and vice versa. Where would the railroads be if there were no agricultural products to transport? And where would agriculture be in the far West without railroads to take the products to a good market? It is therefore doubly unfortunate that lately these two interests, so mutually dependent on each other, have been brought into antagonism; but the remedy to reconciliation is easy if the financial managers of the railroads understood their own interests. The farmers can not change anything; all that they can do is to attempt to obtain the greatest possible amount of produce from their lands; the railroads should not, therefore, take advantage of their helplessness by charging exorbitant prices for transportation, thereby crushing the agriculture of the West. ... [These transportation charges] are so high, that in many cases it is equivalent to a practical prohibition of transportation, as no farmer will send his products when the cost of transportation comes to near the marketable value of the articles. There are many instances where farmers have preferred to use their apples and other fruit for feeding the hogs, and their corn for fuel, rather than submit to losing it nearly all by the cost of railroad transportation.

• Document 4 •

My thesis is this: the needless waste of railway competition has been sufficient to provide good, comfortable homes—a whole house to a family—for that part of the entire population of the United States not already provided with such homes.

The first item in the count is needless expenditure in railway construction....

Second, every needless train is a waste, and parallel and competing roads necessitate a vast number of them daily.

Third, our railways have not been planned according to any intelligent scheme, so that they should become part of one grand system of communication and transportation....

[Also, lower railroad rates for some] are an external force against which all their competitors must contend. Their rivals enter into the struggle carrying a weight, a weight varying in amount, but at times great enough to bear down even those who would otherwise be strongest. Where competition is sharp, ... a slight variation in charges in favor of one party is all that is needed to make the fortune of that one and to ruin competitors.