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# The Americans In Panama

## Story of the Panama Canal From Start to Finish

By Wm. R. Scott

...to murder hundreds, finally burning Panama to the ground. Today tourists go out to see a tower and other ruins of the famous old city of Panama. Panama was rebuilt on a short promontory in the Pacific and, although captured again by the pirates in 1680, has remained on the new site to this time.

Panama in 1821 caught the spirit of revolt and accomplished its freedom from Spain in a bloodless revolution. It then joined the Confederation of New Granada, the Colombia of today, under Simon Bolivar, South America's great soldier and statesman. Here ended the career of the Spanish in Panama.

### CHAPTER IV.

#### The French in Panama.

THE independence of Panama from Spain by a bloodless revolution in 1821 had placed the isthmus in a new position for other European governments of the United States to negotiate terms or concessions. The American people were jealous of foreign activities, but not aggressively active themselves in concrete efforts toward a canal.

The ever alert French in 1847, after securing a concession to build a railroad, allowed it to lapse. It is significant that this French failure was followed, as in the case of trying to dig a canal, by a successful attempt by the Americans.

Three Americans—William H. Aspinwall, John L. Stephens and Henry Clayey of New York, taking advantage of the opening made by the French failure obtained a concession from the Bogota government in 1847 for building a railroad across the isthmus at Panama, with the important provision that no canal could be constructed there without the company's consent.

Their concession was for a period of forty-nine years after the completion of the railroad, but Colombia reserved the right, twenty years after its completion, to purchase the road for \$5,000,000.

Luckily for the American promoters the discovery of gold in California in 1849 came just as they were seeking to float their company. The isthmian route to California at once became heavily traveled, and the eyes of the whole world, particularly of the United States, were again fastened upon Panama.

The addition of the territories of Oregon and California to the United States still further emphasized the need of quick communication between the Atlantic and Pacific. The Panama railroad, therefore, took hold upon the popular imagination.

Aspinwall and his associates pushed the construction of the road under James L. Baldwin, an American civil engineer of uncommon ability. Labor of a desirable kind was not obtainable. Many nationalities were tried, with a tragic failure on the part of the Chinese, who seemed unable to face the terrors of the jungle. The life cost of



Photo by American Press Association Col. Geo. W. Goethals

the Panama railroad in the five years it was building has been estimated at 6,000 persons.

The route selected started at an island near the coast on the Atlantic side, the site of the city of Colon crossed the hills into the valley of the Chagres river and followed that valley to the continental divide, over which it passed with a maximum elevation of 233 feet above sea level, and thence down to Panama on the Pacific side. Treacherous swamps, almost impenetrable jungles and formidable stream and mountains necessitated incredible hard labor and continuous work from 1850 to Jan. 28, 1855, when the first train reached Panama from Colon. The line was forty-seven miles long built of Belgian rails and on a gauge of five feet.

The standard gauge in the United States is four feet eight and a half inches, so that all locomotives and cars used on the Panama railroad have to be specially built with wheels set farther apart.

The total cost had been \$7,407,553, or about \$158,000 a mile. Dividends were paid every year from 1853 to 1892 and from 1901 to 1903, when it became United States property.

The great prosperity of the railroad suffered a serious setback with the completion of the California overland railroad in 1869. Thenceforward the valuable bullion shipments avoided Panama, as well as passenger and freight business. The business shows a steady decline from that year.

Colombia turned to the French after negotiating fruitlessly with the United States over a canal concession, and the company headed by M. de Lesseps was granted a right of way. It bought the road for \$18,094,000 in 1881, paying considerably more than it was worth, or \$250 a share for sixty-eight seventieths of the capital stock.

The French neglected the commercial possibilities even more than the American owners had, though dividends were earned during the life of the first company. When the United States bought the interests of the French company in 1904 the Panama railroad was one of the properties transferred. It was sadly run down but under the Americans it was made over into a modernly equipped and operated system, though subordinated as a commercial proposition to the construction of the canal.

Passenger rates dropped from \$25 a one way ticket in 1855 to \$2.40 under the Americans today. The trip from Colon to Panama is two hours and a half, and the coaches are painted yellow because that color best stands the isthmian climate.

The plans for the canal as adopted by the Americans in 1906 played havoc with the right of way of the railroad, so in June, 1907, the work of relocating it back among the hills out of reach of Gatun lake was begun. After five years' work, or as long as it required to build the original line in 1850-5, the new line was opened to traffic in 1912.

This twentieth century Panama railroad has cost \$9,000,000, as compared with the cost of the nineteenth century road, \$7,000,000, an increase of \$2,000,000 after a lapse of sixty years.

The dream of a pan-American railroad has been entertained ever since steam locomotion came into use. When several gaps are filled in there will be railroad communication through Mexico, Guatemala and Nicaragua to Costa Rica, which adjoins Panama. The republic of Panama has been planning an interior railroad system that would be part of an all rail route from the United States to the canal. Before many years it is likely that a bridge will span the canal in a railroad system that reaches from Canada through Panama to the mainland of South America, thence down the west coast to Valparaiso.

Ferdinand de Lesseps and his Panama career vindicate strikingly the truth of the adage that nothing succeeds like success. The French Panama Canal company was floated on the strength of his achievement in cutting a sea level passage from the Mediterranean to the Red sea, thus making an island of Africa.

When he turned his attention to Panama as a new field for glory the French people enthusiastically applauded his audacity and, what is more significant and substantial, invested, first and last, \$25,000,000 in the enterprise.

The French were theatrical in their plans for launching the enterprise. A world congress of engineers was invited to assemble in Paris in May, 1879, to decide upon the type and cost of the canal. M. de Lesseps presided and guided the decision to a sea level type, the same as at Suez. There were eleven Americans in the assembly, the extent of American interest.

Under the stimulus of these proceedings the new company's stock was oversubscribed by the admiring countrymen of the great De Lesseps, the first issue being for \$90,000,000. M. de Lesseps then made a spectacular trip to Panama, arriving at Colon on Dec. 30, 1879.

The first blast of an explosive in the construction of the isthmian canal was set off by one of the young daughters of M. de Lesseps at Culebra on Jan. 10, 1880. After several weeks of banqueting Count de Lesseps left for the United States to stir the imagination of the Americans over the enterprise. About the only result was to attract the attention of some contractors to the work.

Operations went ahead rapidly from 1880 onward, the method being to let contracts for the different phases of the work. The canal started near Colon, in Limon bay, and was to follow the valley of the Chagres river for about thirty miles, thence through the continental divide to the Pacific, three

miles west of Panama, about where the canal begins.

By 1885, however, extravagance and graft had emptied the company's treasury. The contractors, as a rule, did little and exacted much. It became apparent, too, that a sea level type presented staggering difficulties. M. de Lesseps gave his consent to a change in plans to a lock type, but the dam was to be at Bohio instead of at Gatun. Bohio is seventeen miles from the Caribbean, while Gatun is only seven miles distant from that sea.

All the theatrical methods conceivable were employed to float a new bond issue for \$160,000,000, but the public had grown dubious over the success of the enterprise. The amount was raised, however, and was poured into the project with more millions until 1889, when, after \$234,765,017 had been invested, the company became bankrupt.

The French treated their white employees with extravagant generosity. Living accommodations were on a scale of open handed liberality. Little was done beyond building hospitals to counter the bad health conditions of the isthmus, and, while the French left patterns for much of the later American activities, the sanitary control of the jungle distinctively is an American triumph. The death rate among French employees on the canal was from two to three times as high as under the Americans.

In 1890 an extension of ten years to the time for completing the canal was granted by Colombia, and subsequently extensions were permitted that advanced the life of the concession until Oct. 31, 1910. A new Panama Canal company was organized in 1894, with a capital of \$13,000,000, and, while it spent this amount and more, it never attained the momentum of the first company. The maximum force under the first company was 25,000 men and under the second regime 3,000.

The total excavation by the French in Panama was 78,000,000 yards, of which the first company took out 65,000,000 yards, but out of all their work only 29,908,000 yards were excavated from the present American route. For years before the Americans came the French did just enough work to keep their concession alive.

The mechanical equipment we took over from the French, the houses and hospitals and especially the engineering records were invaluable from the start of American operations, and much still is in use.

An effort was made by the French company in 1898 to interest the United States government in the enterprise provided permission could be secured from Colombia. But this failed, and the plan of 1903 for turning the property over to the United States was its successor.

### U. S. SEEKS NO ADDITIONAL TERRITORY

Mobile, Ala.—While avoiding any mention specifically of Mexico or any European influence connected with the Mexican situation, President Wilson delivered a speech here before the Southern Commercial congress which appeared to be freighted with significance and which served to point with further directness the policy of the United States not only toward Mexico, but toward all Central and South American republics.

A score of South American diplomats sat just behind the president, while he spoke and many of his remarks were addressed in conversational tones to them. The president spoke only in general terms, but many of his sentences were pointed with meaning so clear as to leave little doubt of their intent.

The president's speech was uttered with a confidence which bespoke the dominant part the United States expects to play in the future of the American republics. Not through an idea of "material interest," he carefully explained, but through a love of the people of constitutional liberty.

"The United States never again will seek to obtain one additional foot of territory by conquest," he declared amid applause.

Pullman College Team Defeated. Portland.—Three thousand football enthusiasts saw the Multnomah club defeat Washington state college club. Winged "M" field, 7 to 0.

Oregon Wins, 27-0, Over Idaho. Eugene.—By a score of 27 to 0, Oregon eliminated Idaho from the race for the conference football championship on Kincaid field.

Aggies Unable to Score at Seattle. Seattle.—The University of Washington football team defeated Oregon Agricultural college by a score of 4 to 0 on Denny field here.

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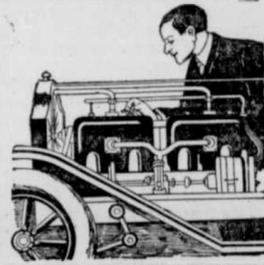
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