

were enlarged so that two-horse drawn sleds could pass through the snow tunnels. During the winter months, avalanches were the most dangerous hazard the workers faced (PBS 2008). Avalanches and freezing temperatures claimed the lives of a number of Chinese workers, who were lost when snow broke loose from above and either buried or swept them away (Williams 1988:186-187). Their bodies were often not recovered until the following spring.

## Strike

While the Chinese were industrious and hard workers, they were also men who wanted to make their wealth and return to China. In the early summer of 1867, the Central Pacific directors realized that the company was having trouble attracting the much needed additional laborers (PBS 2008). The Central Pacific railroad was competing with mining concerns that were enticing the workers try and become rich. In an effort to encourage more enrollment, Charles Crocker, raised the workers' monthly wages from the \$31 to \$35 a month. The effort backfired.

On June 25, Chinese workers grading along a two-mile stretch on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains left the work and returned to their camp. Strobridge, the project supervisor, became enraged and lit into the men. However, all of his persuasion had no effect on the workers. The workers demanded an additional \$5 a month to \$40 instead of the offered \$35, as well as a reduction in the number of hours worked. At that time, the Chinese workday began at dawn and ended at dusk. The workers wanted the limit their work hours to ten hours a day. Other demands included, shorter shifts in the tunnels. Rather than give in to their demands, Crocker gathered the Chinese foremen and told them that he was prepared to stop all work before considering a single one of their demands. After two days of consideration, the Chinese workers decided to expand the strike all along the line, and also raised their wage demands to \$45 a month.

Crocker's response was to cut off the Chinese food supplies and wait. After a week without supplies, the Chinese men capitulated. Crocker dictated the terms, which stated that wages and hours were immutable. He also stated that if the hungry Chinese workers would return to work immediately they would only be fined. However, if they continued to strike Crocker would withhold their pay for the entire month of June. The men agreed to return to work despite the few who did not want to give in. A few months later the wages were increased to \$35 (Chew 2004:49)

Once the Central Pacific rails were beyond the mountains of California, work along the new grade began to pick up speed (Williams 1988:236). While work continue on several of the tunnels, the majority of the worked moved out on to the desert of northern Nevada and crews began to make rapid progress.