

Summary of Events in the Construction of the Panama Canal

One of the greatest engineering works ever attempted was the construction of the Panama canal. As the undertaking is now nearing completion a summary of some of the more important events in connection with the canal may be of interest.

The work was started in 1881 by a French company which shortly afterward went bankrupt, and sold their holdings to the New Panama Canal company. They were not much more successful than their predecessors, and in 1903 the United States purchased their rights and property for \$40,000,000 and the canal zone from the republic of Panama for \$10,000,000.

At first the engineer in charge was a man taken from civil life, but this did not prove successful and army engineers were placed on the commission who have charge of all the work of the canal one. Since February, 1907, Colonel Goethals has been chief engineer and has proved to be a remarkably efficient man.

It was decided at the outset to proceed with construction of all of the important points at one time so that they might be completed together or as nearly so as possible. It was expected that Culebra Cut and the Gatun Dam would prove the most important factors in the canal construction and the most improved methods were adopted for this work. The excavation has been carried on by the largest steam shovels that have ever been built and the material is carried away by the always waiting trains of dirt cars. The slides in Culebra Cut have caused more or less difficulty in that they necessitated the excavation of about 23 per cent more of material than had been originally calculated.

It is hoped that the formal opening of the canal will take place January 1, 1914, and all of the important works are now either completed or far enough advanced that only some unexpected catastrophe will prevent it. There will still be a small amount of material to be taken out after the water is turned into the canal but this will be in continuous operation for at least several years to take care of any material washed into the channel from the banks. The operation of the canal and the canal zone will be under the direction of Colonel Goethals according to the present decision of Congress.

The cost of the canal construction has been greater than was originally estimated but a great many changes have also been made. The total cost, based on present expenditures, is \$375,000,000. A system of tolls has been devised that will ultimately return this amount to the United States. The annual cost of maintenance and operation will be about \$4,000,000 and this is also covered by the revenue from the canal traffic. Thus the advantages of a direct water way between the east and west may be made accessible at no great expense to the United States, and the completion of the Panama canal sees the fulfillment of the hopes of an isthmian canal, raised by the Nicaragua canal projects dating back as far as 1850.

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