On October 24, 1861, the transcontinental tele¬
graph was completed, and like the transconti¬
nental railroad, it was built by two crews working
toward the middle. The telegraph wire roughly followed the
route taken by the fabled Pony Express and its completion
signaled the demise of the one-year-old delivery system.
The two construction crews met in Salt Lake City,
Utah on the 24th. Brigham Young sent the first tele¬
gram west but the first coast-to-coast message was sent
by California’s Chief Justice Stephen J. Field at 7:40 pm
and received by President Abraham Lincoln 3,595 miles
away, in Washington, DC at 11:30 am on Oct. 25th. Some
six months into the Civil War, Field, substituting for the
temporarily absent Gov. John Downey, used the telegram
to pledge California’s loyalty to the United States.

To Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States:
In the temporary absence of the Governor of the State,
I am requested to send you the first message which
will be transmitted over the wires of the telegraph line
which connect the Pacific with the Atlantic States.
The people of California desire to congratulate
you upon the completion of the great work. They
believe that it will be the means of strengthening
the attachment which binds both the East and the
West to the Union, and they desire in this, the first
message across the Continent, to express their
loyalty to that Union, and their determination to
stand by the Government, in this, its day of trial.
They regard that Government with affection, and
will adhere to it under all fortunes.

STEPHEN J. FIELD, Chief Justice of California.

Fewer than two years later, Lincoln appointed Field
to the U.S Supreme Court.

Endnotes
1. This note is drawn from Dakota Livesay, “Transcontinental
Telegraph. The Week in the Old West,” White Mountain
Board Member David Ettinger for his post noting this milestone,
“The first transcontinental telegram was sent by a California
Supreme Court chief justice,” At the Lectern, Oct. 27, 2019,
http://www.atthelectern.com/the-first-transcontinental-telegram-was-
sent-by-a-california-supreme-court-chief-justice/.
2. “The Telegraph to California. The First Message over the
the-first-message-over-the-pacific-line.html.

FIRST LEGAL HISTORY TRAVEL GRANT WINNERS ANNOUNCED

Earlier this year, the California Supreme Court Historical Society established a research grant program
to help defray the travel and archival-related expenses of graduate students and law students pursuing research
on California legal history.

The fund has now awarded its first grants, to Taylor Cozzens, a history master’s student at the University
of Oklahoma, and Smita Ghosh, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Pennsylvania.

Ghosh’s research relates to her dissertation on the history of immigrant detention, and the grant will help
fund her travel to several archives in Los Angeles and the Bay Area. Cozzens’ research focuses on the history
of the California Rural Legal Assistance organization during the 1970s. The non-profit CRLA, founded in 1966,
provides legal services to California’s low-income individuals and communities. The grant will enable Cozzens
to work with materials in Stanford University’s Special Collections.

The Society congratulates these young scholars.

The Legal History Travel Grant is funded by the generosity of California Supreme Court Justice Kathryn
Mickle Werdegar (Ret.) and David M. Werdegar, M.D., in honor of Selma Moidel Smith, editor-in-chief of
California Legal History.

Application information is found at https://www.cschs.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/CSCHS-California-
Legal-History-Research-Travel-Grant-121018.pdf. Applications are considered on a rolling basis.