



William C. Van Horne: Railway Titan (Quest Biography)

Valerie Knowles

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William C. Van Horne was one of North America's most accomplished men. Born in Illinois in 1843, Van Horne started working in the railway business at a young age. In 1881 he was lured north to Canada to become general manager of the fledgling Canadian Pacific Railway. The railroading general pushed through construction of the CPR's transcontinental line and then went on to become the company's president. During his time with the CPR, Van Horne developed a telegraph service, launched the Empress line of Pacific steamships in 1891, and founded CP Hotels. He capped his career by opening up Cuba's interior with a railway.

A man of prodigious energy and many talents, he also became Canada's foremost art collector and one of the country's leading financiers. For all of his amazing accomplishments, Van Horne was knighted in 1894. When he died church bells throughout the length and breadth of Cuba tolled to mark his passing, and when his funeral train made its way across Canada, all traffic on the CPR system was suspended for five minutes.

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