



A Moment In Time



The most famous photograph associated with the first transcontinental railroad is Andrew J. Russell’s “East and West Shaking Hands at Laying of Last Rail.” Commonly known as “The Champagne Photo,” Russell’s “East and West” was one of many glassplate exposures taken on May 10, 1869, by three photographers who were present at the Golden Spike Ceremony. More than any other image of that day, however, the champagne photo seems to capture a defining moment in our nation’s history.

THE CHAMPAGNE PHOTO

Following the driving of the last spike, Union Pacific engine *No. 119* and Central Pacific’s *Jupiter* were run up until they nearly touched. Railroad officials retired to their cars, leaving the engineers and workmen to celebrate.

The champagne flowed and engineers George Booth and Sam Bradford each broke a bottle

upon the other’s locomotive. Samuel S. Montague, Central Pacific’s Chief Engineer and his counterpart in the Union Pacific, Grenville M. Dodge, shook hands to symbolize the end of the race to build the nation’s first transcontinental railroad. This moment in time became immortalized in Andrew J. Russell’s famous photograph.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Photographer Andrew J. Russell began his career as an artist. As a commissioned officer in the Civil War, he was assigned to special duty as photographer for the U.S. Military Railroad Construction Corps.

After the war, Russell went west to record images of the Union Pacific Railroad as it was built westward from Omaha, Nebraska. The result of his efforts is a collection of 650 10 x 13 inch glass plate negatives now in the Oakland Museum, Oakland, California.

The making of each photograph was a time-consuming process. The image was first composed on ground glass, then a sensitized glass plate was inserted in the camera. Chemicals for the plate had to be mixed on the spot and remain wet during the time of exposure. In

addition, there was no camera shutter. The photographer simply removed the lens cap and replaced it when he guessed the time was about right. Finally the photographer or his assistant would develop the picture in a nearby portable darkroom.



WHO’S WHO AT PROMONTORY MAY 10, 1869

Photographs, diaries and other historic records indicate that about 1,000 people participated in the celebration at Promontory Summit on May 10, 1869. Politicians, officials of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads, railroad workers (including a Chinese contingent from the Central Pacific), five companies of soldiers from the 21st U.S. Infantry Regiment, and

members of the public from near and far were in attendance. Although the crowd was mostly men, a small number of women and children were present.

“East and West Shaking Hands At Laying of Last Rail”

LEGEND

- 1 Samuel S Montague
CPRR Chief Engineer
- 2 Grenville M. Dodge
UPRR Chief Engineer
- 3 James Strobridge
CPRR Construction Supt.
- 4 George Booth
Engineer, *Jupiter*
- 5 Sam Bradford
Engineer, No. 119
- 6 Elias Jensen
- 7 John Wilson Kellogg
- 8 Thomas Shore Wadsworth
- 9 William Daley
- 10 Cyrus Arnold Sweet
- 11 H.L. Harry Greensides
- 12 Horatio H. Hancock
- 13 Hezikiah Bissell
- 14 George Checketts
- 15 Moroni Strubel Poulter
- 16 Samuel Faddis
- 17 _____ Hirsch
- 18 Israel Hunsaker
- 19 Abraham Hunsaker
- 20 Joshua Williams
- 21 William Neeley
- 22 Robert Todd
- 23 Andrew N. Bjerregard
- 24 Richard Brown
- 25 John Percival
- 26 John Rixon Moseley
- 27 Joseph Wayment
- 28 Michael Stanton



The great Rail Road problem of the age is now solved.

The continental iron band now permanently unites the distant portions of the Republic, and opens up to Commerce, Navigation, and Enterprise the vast unpeopled plains and lofty mountain ranges that now divide the East from the West.

Last Monday as I witnessed the driving of the last spike in this great work, I felt a pride in being in a certain sense a representative of the people... Standing amid “The Antrès vast and Desert wild” surrounded with the representative men of the nation, an epoch in the march of civilization was recorded, and a new era in human progress was ushered in.

Andrew J. Russell