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ANNIVERSARY OF THE GOLDEN SPIKE

The 150th Anniversary of the driving of the Golden Spike which connected the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific Railroad was quite an accomplishment and is going to be quite celebration this year.

An overlooked tidbit of American History is the date inscribed on the original Golden Spike. The spike was used in the ceremony for the "Wedding of the Rails" which was the joining of the tracks laid by the Central Pacific Railroad and the Union Pacific Railroad Companies in the spring of 1869.

The engraving on the spike is "May 8, 1869" which was a Saturday. This was the date chosen by the Federal Government for the American Nation to celebrate this historic event. However, a quick check of history shows that the actual date of the driving of the Golden Spike was Monday May 10, 1869 at Promontory Summit.

After the Federal Government mandated the date and day for the completion of the railroad, Dignitaries of both the Central Pacific coming from California and the Union Pacific coming from Omaha Nebraska headed for Promontory Summit, Utah for this momentous occasion.

Dignities from Central Pacific arrived on the appointed date without much trouble. The officials from the Union Pacific however, encountered two major delays that postponed the "Wedding of the Rails."

The first delay occurred in Piedmont, Wyoming where unpaid and very angry railroad workers laid railroad ties across the tracks and refused to allow the UP officials to continue to Promontory until they were paid back wages. The telegraph operator at Piedmont being sympathetic to the railroad workers refused to wire for military troops from near- by Fort Bridger or law officers from Green River to allow the train to continue.

Finally, Thomas Durant and the other UP officials agreed to the demands of the unpaid workers. By the time the money arrived at Piedmont and the train allowed to continue, it was already Saturday May 8, 1869. Despite this fact the Nation celebrated this great event with wild celebrations in most of the big cities of the country.

The second major delay of the UP officials occurred in lower Weber Canyon at Devils Gate/Horseshoe Bend two miles east of Uintah. The original UP railroad grade (today's Lower track) was built by Mormon workers contracted to build the railroad grade from Rocks Springs Wyoming to Promontory Summit, Utah. The Mormons were known for their hard work and craftsmanship in building the railroad grade, bridges and culverts. But in their haste to finish the railroad, UP officials decided the Mormon workers were too slow and gave culvert and bridge building to other contractors.

Their haste sometimes resulted in shoddy work. One of those places was the bridge crossing the Weber River at Devils Gate.

The bridge was also built in the late summer of 1868 when the river was at low flow. In the spring of 1869, the Weber River was at flood level from the spring melt and the run off washed out and weakened the bridge supports at Uintah.

When the UP officials arrived at Devils Gate Sunday May 9, 1869 the bridge was deemed unsafe to allow the special engine and train to cross. This event delayed the UP officials one more day until other transportation arrangements could be made. Hence, even though the Golden Spike was engraved May 8, 1869, the actual date was Monday May 10, 1869.

Information about events and tickets for the Golden Spike Anniversary can be found at spike150.org. The commemorative tour schedule for the Big Boy No 4014 and Living Legend No. 844 are now online at <https://www.up.com/heritage/steam/schedule/index.htm>.