Over the Range

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I n telling the story of how the area around Promontory Summit developed in relation to the railroad, I not only traveled to the Golden Spike National Historic Site numerous times, but also conducted historical research in archives and through interviews. Both were very pleasant experiences. Promontory Summit and its environs are fascinating but so, too, are the individuals and groups who care about its history. Many kind people helped me in this endeavor to tell Promontory’s story, and I would be remiss if I did not thank them here. First and foremost is Robert (Bob) Spude, of the National Park Service, who sought out my services for this project. Bob knew me in my role as a historical resources consultant and professor at the University of Texas at Arlington. However, he also knew about my love of railroad history and my love for the Great Basin, the subject of two of my recent books. More to the point, though, he provided me a weeklong introduction to the site in July 2005, after which he sent box after box of files to our university so that I could begin work on the project. Bob introduced me to the enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and helpful staff at the Golden Spike National Historic Site at Promontory Summit. Superintendent Maggie Johnson, who passed away before this book could be published, was a joy to work with and will be missed by all. My contacts at the visitors’ center, including acting superintendent Tammy Benson, lead park ranger Valerie Steffen, historical archaeologist Melissa Cobern, and archaeologist Bret Guisto, kindly shared information and helped me make numerous local contacts who I later interviewed. These included Delone Glover of Brigham City, and Merlin and Doris Larsen, whose ranch lies along the east slope of the Promontory Mountains. Bob Spude also introduced me to Michael Polk and his able staff of archaeologists and historians at Sagebrush Consultants in Ogden, Utah. They proved to be extremely helpful as I consulted Promontory
line materials that Michael had collected since the early 1980s. Wendy Simmons Johnson at Sagebrush Consultants kindly provided a wonderful photograph from her personal family collection. Michael personally provided me valuable information as I spent several days at his office in Ogden, and for that I am especially grateful. The staff at the Box Elder County Courthouse in Brigham City were especially helpful in locating historic maps of the old railroad right of way.

Over the years, I have developed a number of excellent historical contacts in this region. These include Noel Carmack of Utah State University in Logan; Michael (Mike) Landon of the archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City; Phil Notarianni, director of the Utah State Historical Society; and Utah railroad authority Don Strack of Centerville. At the Nevada Historical Society archives in Reno, Eric Moody was also quite helpful. Outside the region, associates like Jim Ackerman of the Newberry Library in Chicago, and Peter Blodgett of the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, were extremely helpful. Peter put me in touch with Huntington staff member Dixie Dillon, who helped me gain access to a crucial document that shed new light on the Mormons’ role in surveying the railroad in Promontory and vicinity. Helpful, too, was the staff at the DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University, including Anne Peterson and Cynthia Franco. The staff at the Denver Public Library helped me gain access to their treasure trove of historical photographs. In Sacramento at the western terminus of the original Pacific Railroad, the California State Railroad Museum (CSRM) staff also provided numerous materials. In particular, CSRM Curator of History & Technology Kyle Wyatt shared his expertise with me on several occasions. At the Union Pacific Museum in Council Bluffs, Iowa, John Bromley was especially helpful. So, too, were the staff members at the University of Iowa in Iowa City, which houses a considerable collection of Union Pacific materials. At the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, fellow geographer and railroad historian Richard Smith helped me gain access to numerous unpublished maps. David Myrick, the dean of western railroad historians, kindly answered my questions about Promontory despite the fact that he was “wrapping up” two books on other railroads in the Intermountain West at the time. Another former SP employee, Lynn Farrar, also helped point me to historic source material. A new associate, John Masters of Wichita, Kansas, provided valuable information on the 1903 Curved Dash Oldsmobile—one of the very first automobiles to travel through Promontory.

Several colleagues and associates at my university also assisted immeasurably. These include Ben Huseman, of UT Arlington’s Special Collections, who—along with other staff members—provided numerous
maps from our extensive cartographic collections. UT Arlington graduate Nate Kogan kindly provided a copy of a Mormon mural featuring a painting of the golden spike ceremony at the 1964–1965 New York World’s Fair. Ann Jennings, secretary at the Center for Greater Southwestern Studies and the History of Cartography was my right-hand person from the beginning to the conclusion of this project. In addition to typing the original and many revised drafts of the manuscript, Ann made travel arrangements, secured materials, and kept track of paperwork on this multi-year grant-funded project. Without her help, the help of the other people mentioned above, and some I’ve probably missed mentioning, this book could not have been written.