Over the Range
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Chapter 9

Remembering Promontory
(1942–Present)

The removal of the spike at Promontory in 1942 had special significance to the movie-going public, who had seen the golden spike ceremony of 1869 re-enacted in the recent Cecil B. DeMille film *Union Pacific* (1939). It was one thing to read about the events of 1869 at Promontory, but quite another to see them recreated on film, that persuasive medium so capable of shaping, even manipulating, popular beliefs. *Union Pacific* was a celebration of the railroad as a shaper of history. In order to depict the building of the transcontinental railroad, DeMille had to find other locomotives as stand-ins. Despite their fame in 1869, the Union Pacific No. 119 and Central Pacific Jupiter had been scrapped in the early twentieth century. That, however, did not stop their reincarnation in pageants and in motion pictures. A show at the San Francisco Panama-Pacific Exposition in 1915, for example, depicted the joining of the rails at Promontory. Similarly, in the late 1930s, other events featured replicas of the two locomotives. In one case, two Nevada Central steam locomotives, numbers 5 and 6, were cosmetically altered to appear more like their prototypes. Number 5 became the Jupiter, with its large bonnet-shaped smokestack, and number 6 was transformed into Union Pacific No. 119 with its straight stack. Along with their passenger train consists, these locomotives and cars made brave, if somewhat strained, stand-ins—the biggest inconsistency being the fact that they were narrow gauge equipment!

This faux equipment was widely viewed in San Francisco, but films also presented Promontory to the American public. *The Iron Horse* directed by John Ford was released in 1924, and the 1939 film *Union Pacific* made
union pacific was an important late-1930s, early-1940s era western film as it marked the beginning of a renaissance in the genre. its simple plot of good triumphing over evil, and things ending happily, was typical demille. however, through its use of wide-open landscapes and its seemingly authentic depiction of railroading, demille’s film gave the events on-screen a larger than life quality that would become a hallmark of later western films. its cinematography by victor milner and dewey wrigley, though filmed in black and white, gave audiences prolonged

fig. 9-1
in 1939, the cecil b. demille epic union pacific featured a clamorous re-enactment of the joining of the rails at promontory in 1869.

two more locomotives—in this case, standard gauge from the virginia & truckee railroad in nevada—even more famous. as portrayed on celluloid by demille, the trains and scenes of promontory, or approximations of them and the event, became icons for yet another generation. union pacific celebrated the winning of the west, a potent theme to a nation just digging itself out of the great depression (ca. 1929–1939). demille reportedly pondered whether to portray the union pacific or the santa fe railroad in this film, and tossed a coin to decide. union pacific was the winner, and the rest is cinematic history. naturally, a film about the union pacific just had to feature the driving of the golden spike at promontory—a challenge that demille relished as it was the kind of spectacle he loved to film.

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views of western scenery and railroad activity (fig. 9–1). *Union Pacific* ran over two hours in length (133 minutes) at a time when most Westerns were an hour or an hour and a-half in length, and was by all accounts an epic. Naturally, the plot of construction overseer (Joel McCrea) versus gambler (Brian Donlevy) and the presence of Barbara Stanwyck as “athletic heroine, leaping on and off boxcars with the best of them” are contrived. However, the box-office success of *Union Pacific* worked to help unify the nation and venerate the past. Ironically, although *Union Pacific*’s final scenes could have been filmed at Promontory, which still had its railroad at this time, they were not. The real Promontory was remote and not quite as photogenic as the Nevada locations that DeMille selected. After long film careers, the two locomotives used in *Union Pacific* can still be seen today, “UP 119” is on display at Old Tucson, while the “Jupiter” is exhibited at the Nevada State Railroad Museum in Carson City.

With the romantic action of the driving of the golden spike immortalized on film, celebrations at Promontory did not end in 1942. By the mid- to late twentieth century, events celebrating the joining of the rails here became an institution—first drawing people locally, then nationally. In an interview on December 9, 2005, Delone B. Glover (born 1924) of Brigham City fondly recalled Promontory celebrations. Her first was in 1947. Then, in 1951, a few people visited the site for a “makeshift re-enactment. The men put on false beards and dressed in period clothing. The women donned dresses.” This commemorative event on May 10, 1951, was, in fact, the first *annual* golden spike commemoration. The Brigham City Chamber of Commerce initiated these yearly events, which were carried on thereafter by the Box Elder Golden Spike Association, of which Bernice Anderson served as president. Glover recalled being part of the annual events for several years when, “in 1957, we got the status of a Golden Spike Monument.” To help fund the ceremonies, the group sold gold-painted 3–inch mine spikes and printed programs for 25 cents. Ms. Glover recalled that J. D. Harris of Tremonton “gave us a hundred dollars to put his ad[vertisement] on our programs for many years.” Noting that she has saved all of the programs from those events, Glover recalled how rewarding it felt when “in 1965, we were designated a historic site.”

These ceremonies in the early 1950s became bigger and bigger annual events that brought local communities together (fig. 9–2). The only time Ms. Glover recalled missing the ceremony was when the date fell on a Sunday, which she would not attend for religious reasons. Consequently, the event took place on Saturday. However, as she put it, “so many people came on Sunday that they held a ceremony then,
too—twice in one year!” Glover remembered that one time it was so windy that the wind blew the fake whiskers off the men! She recalled that the ceremonies went on regardless of weather—“rain, dirt, dust, [and] wind.”

On May 10, 1958, at one of the annual re-enactments of the driving of the golden spike at Promontory, something seemed to be missing. Although several hundred people were present, as one observer put it, “they noted that nothing but a small cement monument and a short strip of rail remained at the historic site.” In his speech to the crowd, Horace A. Sorensen stated that “something ought to be done” to rectify the situation. Sorensen and his wife contacted members of Congress as well as the National Park Service, which had begun to take an interest in the site. At that time, the National Park Service was becoming more
actively involved in interpreting and preserving historic sites of national importance, and Promontory definitely qualified. The Sorensens’ visit to Washington, D.C. certainly paid off, and upon returning to Utah, they interested the Union Pacific in helping to immortalize the “age of steam railroading at Corinne. Here, on the strip of land between the railroad and US Highway 30, Union Pacific installed trackage and donated rolling stock and a steam locomotive. As the second actor in the original golden-spike ceremony, Southern Pacific also donated a steam locomotive as well as a section worker’s handcar. With the support of the National Park Service and the Sons of Utah Pioneers, the project moved ahead rapidly. A railroad station was moved to Corinne from Honeyville, and an 80-foot stage erected for the re-enactment. As backdrops, replicas of the original engines in the 1869 joining of the rails were built. The “railroad village,” as it was called, was dedicated about a year later. On May 9, 1959, a re-enactment marked the 90th anniversary of the joining of the rails. This, however, was considered “only the beginning,” as a working relationship with the National Park Service had now been established.5

On May 10, 1960, the Golden Spike Association of Box Elder County and the Box Elder County Commission sponsored a re-enactment at Promontory Summit. After speeches, band music, and the “Advance of the National Colors,” National Park Service officials, state dignitaries, railroad officials, and special guests were welcomed. The pageant itself—the Driving of the Golden Spike—was directed by L. D. Wilde at 12:47 p.m. Judge Lewis Jones introduced and discussed “Stalwarts of the Golden Spike Era” after which a memorial wreath was laid, with one minute of silence for “Taps.” Officials of the Golden Spike Association included President Bernice Gibbs Anderson, Vice President Dean Coombs, and Secretary-Treasurer Delone Glover.6

By the mid-1960s, plans were well underway for the big event—the centennial celebration—just four years in the future. This event represented a partnership between various levels of government and the private sector. On July 30, 1965, the Golden Spike National Historic Site was created to commemorate the completion of the first transcontinental railroad across the United States. Also in 1965, Horace A. Sorensen wrote an article in the Sons of Utah Pioneers News, stating that “Utah’s Next big centennial will be observed in 1969, and will commemorate the completion of the first transcontinental railroad—the joining of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific at Promontory Point [sic] in northern Utah in 1869.” Sorensen wrote that the “historic incident,” as he called it, “has been recorded by western historians as one of the ten greatest events in the history of America.” He also noted that the state of Utah had
appointed a committee to make sure that the railroad centennial event was not treated as shabbily as the centennial of the Pony Express, “in which Utah did very little outside of selecting a queen and putting on the regular musical play ‘Annie Get your Gun’ which was a great show but had nothing to do with the Pony Express!” Sorensen’s statement is revealing, for it reflects a growing interest in historical accuracy and authenticity. Noting that real expertise, or “know how” as he called it, was necessary to pull off a major event, Sorensen observed that a national committee had helped make the commemoration of the Pony Express successful. That kind of broad cooperation was necessary, and Sorensen said that kind of effort “should prove helpful in the Golden Spike observation.”

Even though she was far too young to recall the Promontory line’s heyday, Delone Glover remembered that one of the buildings at Promontory—a frame building—was moved from a farm in the Fielding area northeast of Tremonton. Another building that Glover was quite familiar with—the old station at Corinne, which was later used as a museum in the 1960s and 1970s—figures prominently in the history of this line (fig. 9–3). Ms. Glover recalled that people brought in artifacts from all over the area to add to the museum’s growing collection. Given
his unflagging interest in bringing Promontory’s history to life, Horace Sorenson helped finance the facility. He donated a train car, which stood south of the building. When the depot was sold, however, Glover recalled that the railroad car and all the artifacts were taken out and removed by train. The trains themselves, she believed, went to Heber City.8 The station building at Corinne was cut into sections; one part is now (2008) the busy general store and gas station just north of the highway and railroad right of way, while the other portion rests on wooden supports just south of the railroad tracks across the highway from the gas station and store. This building (or rather buildings) is noteworthy, for it is the line’s only known Central Pacific building in existence (fig. 9–4).

In the 1960s, artists frequently depicted images of the transcontinental railroad. For example, the completion of the railroad at Promontory Summit was one of numerous themes used by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Mormon Pavilion at the New York World’s Fair in 1964–65.9 In integrating the joining of the rails with other themes in Utah history, including the development of irrigation canals that enabled the state of Utah to develop, the Mormons successfully wedded their history to that of the railroads (fig. 9–5). And why not? As the historical record reveals, the church was an important player in railroad-related developments in the 1860s and 1870s. The composition of the Mormon
mural of early Mormons developing an irrigation canal in 1847 and the painting of the Golden Spike Ceremony of 1869 is quite revealing. Note that both seminal acts of western history are conflated and seem to be simultaneous. Rather than the traditional, horizontal side view depicting both locomotives meeting, this painting is kinetic in that it emphasizes action. By featuring a locomotive that, at first glance, appears to be moving toward the viewer, it suggests there is more to come up ahead. Like the irrigation ditch just to the left of the locomotive, which is under construction by a group of animated workers, the scene invites the viewer in and encourages the action to leap off the canvas, or rather wall, into the viewer’s consciousness. The locomotive painted is evidently the *Jupiter*; the bonnet smokestack tells us as much, its bright red trim and gold accents complimenting the rich golden yellows of the fields. Note, too, that the poses of the dignitaries at the joining of the rails suggest reverence for what is occurring: It is as if God wills both the railroad and irrigation to transform the West. At just this time, the mid-1960s, Utahns were cognizant of a centennial event that was taking shape for 1969—the one-hundredth anniversary of the driving of the golden spike.

In 1968, people in the area were working actively to make the centennial a memorable event. In preparation for events at the Golden
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Spike National Historic Site, the eleven-foot-tall concrete obelisk commemorating the joining of the rails was moved by a 100-ton crane on September 10, 1968, so that it could be closer to the visitor center which now became the hub of activity. The monument had been erected in 1916, the brainchild of Wilson Wright, an engineer for the Southern Pacific. When originally constructed, the large obelisk-shaped monument was built to last—or remain in one place—for it was anchored fully 6½ feet into the ground. Word went out that the celebration would be special and crowds of people prepared to visit the site on May 10, 1969—despite the fact that there were no locomotives present.

As the centennial drew near, and public interest increased, miniaturizing the event into souvenirs gained marketing appeal. Among the items in the collections at the National Park Service’s Golden Spike National Historic Site is a liquor-bottle replica of the Jupiter. Now empty, that bottle evidently contained spirits potent enough to bring back memories of those that flowed on May 10, 1869. The bottom of this bottle notes that it is a “Commemorative Edition,” created by B. Harness for McCormick. Interestingly, the liquor was dispensed through the smokestack!¹⁰ This artifact is a reminder that the centennial of the golden spike in 1969 reached the public in various ways, some educational and some recreational.

By the time the Golden Spike Centennial Celebration took place, model railroading had become a popular hobby. As might be expected, the centennial was marked by the production of numerous models of both the Central Pacific Jupiter and the Union Pacific No. 119. Of these the HO scale Centennial Set made by Atlas Industries in Japan and imported by Pacific Fast Mail (PFM), represented state-of-the-art, brass scale models. Similarly, Balboa Scale Models produced an HO scale Commemorative Set of both locomotives, as illustrated in an advertisement that ran as late as the September 1970 issue of Model Railroader magazine. These brass models became collector’s items, but considerably less expensive, plastic versions of the Jupiter (fig. 9–6) and the No. 119 marketed by Bachmann in both HO scale and N scale enabled modelers to own a piece of history. The models of the two locomotives present at Promontory continue to be produced in 2008, and remain perennial favorites. Originally, all the Central Pacific Jupiter models featured the same incorrect red-colored tender that historians had assumed existed, but more recently, that has been corrected to feature the startling blue color of the actual Jupiter. These HO scale locomotive models are realistic enough that readers will do a double take, for we have digitally placed the model locomotives into an actual photograph taken at Promontory in 2005. The realism of these model locomotives is all the
Through the magic of digitization, the Bachmann HO-scale locomotive models are positioned into the modern-day landscape at Promontory—making it hard to tell that these are miniatures (less than a foot long each).

more apparent when compared to the *Jupiter* and the *No. 119* used in commemorating the Golden Spike today (fig. 9–7).

The passenger cars present on May 10, 1869, have also been produced as scale models. In 1969, the Westwood model company of Fort Wayne, Indiana, produced two, accurate HO-scale sets of the railroad cars at Promontory Summit, one for Union Pacific and one for Central Pacific. The Central Pacific set features kits of the commissary car and President Stanford’s private car (fig. 9–8). When assembled, these cars are highly detailed versions of the prototype built for the centennial celebration. As part of Westwood’s marketing, and to emphasize the rarity (and enhance the collectability) of these “Limited Run” models, “only 1,869 kits (year prototype built)” were released.

As a tribute to the centennial of the golden spike, *Railroad Model Craftsman* magazine featured an article by E. L. Moore in its May 1969
In this 2005 photograph, the Jupiter (left) and No. 119 (right) move closer to each other to commemorate the driving of the golden spike in 1869. Compare with Fig. 9–6.
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issue. Well known for his sense of humor and appreciation of the absurd, Moore did not disappoint. His six-page article began with a poem about “what was it the Engines said” patterned after “Bret Harte, more or less.” As with his prose, Moore’s photographs are humorous. To commemorate the centennial of 1869–1969, Moore constructed a miniature scene featuring trains similar to the Central Pacific Jupiter and Union Pacific No. 119, festooning them with dozens of miniature human figures, including Indians, miners, track workers, and, of course, the railroad’s top brass. Moore’s sense of humor dictated that he place a few inebriated individuals leaning at odd angles, a scenario that in fact occurred at the original ceremony, when champagne and other spirits were liberally consumed by many in the crowd. Moore’s alter ego, his fictitious great-grandfather, Lucifer Penroddy Snooks, was supposedly present for the real event’s miniaturized hijinks. Moore’s stated goal, however, was to give readers “a gander at the low level people who really turned up the sod (and many of them, their toes) and spiked the rails” at Promontory. In this spirit, his model scene of the event generally reproduces Russell’s, Hart’s, and Savage’s photographs, but one big banner proclaims, “The Irish Done it!” while the slogan near the Central Pacific locomotive apparently, or at least allegedly, says much the same thing, only about the Chinese workers in Chinese characters. An American flag flies above the entire miniature scene, parodying the joining of the rails.11

These simulated re-enactments elsewhere, however, could not compete with the concept of Promontory as the real place where history
occurred. In recognition of the site’s importance to national history, the National Park Service had become a partner in this process by showcasing history at the Golden Spike Historical Site. The acquisition of the site by the National Park Service/Department of the Interior coincided with the rise of historic preservation and a growing demand for authenticity and accuracy. This occurred at the same time that an increasing number of people became interested in experiencing history firsthand. Whereas *any* old steam engine might once serve to symbolize the Central Pacific or Union Pacific engines originally involved, as had occurred in 1942, people now became more demanding. They wanted engines that looked like the originals from 1869.

Similar concerns arose with regard to structures at Promontory. In 1969, National Park Service staff hoped to erect tents for the centennial ceremony. However, time and cost restrictions prevented this from occurring. With the nation’s bicentennial (1776–1976) celebration looming in 1974, tents again sprang up on the site of Promontory. These included eleven replica tents and one Indian teepee. Exhibits included the questionable but stereotypically “old time” activities of blacksmithing and baking bread in wood-fired stoves. This enthusiasm was understandable, for the goal was to encourage visitors to experience the past with all his or her senses. Expressing concern about such well-meaning efforts, National Park Service historian Robert Utley noted that certain activities might be “correspondingly distractive *sic* if not actually subversive.” Living history was acceptable, even encouraged, provided that it met standards of “honesty as well as accuracy,” as the National Park Service Interpretive Guidelines (NPS-6) of 1980 put it. Activities at the site from the late 1960s to early 1970s fell short of newer, increasingly strict standards. By the late 1970s, the existing tents were modified, and interpretive activities improved, all in an effort to improve accuracy.

The concept of accuracy was all the more important because the National Park Service was about to embark on improvements at the Golden Spike Historic Site as well as the construction of two superb replicas of the locomotives that stood, pilot to pilot, on May 10, 1869. In spring 1979, *Great World of Model Railroading* magazine published a “Transcontinental 110th Anniversary Special Issue.” In addition to describing the HO-scale locomotives available, this issue highlighted the production of DeMille’s *Union Pacific* and the 1939 celebration of the golden spike in Omaha, Nebraska. As the earlier celebration in Ogden (1919), the event in Omaha brought many people together. One source noted that “[t]he entire civic, business and labor interests of the community have joined hands with other towns to make the occasion the most outstanding in the history of Omaha and the motion picture
industry.” Indians from several tribes were also represented. The *Great World of Model Railroading* article notes that “[a] solid downtown block of store front buildings, covered with false fronts to resemble a street of 1869 . . .” was the centerpiece of the event. The magazine also featured an article on the “Full-Size Models of the Promontory Engines” which were under construction in 1979 and beginning to attract considerable attention. These, of course, are the stunning replicas that run today—which author Bill Wright enthusiastically branded, “What may be the last two steam engines ever built.”

The construction of the two operating locomotives (fig. 9–9) and (fig. 9–10) is remarkable in that no plans of the original locomotives existed in the 1970s. With the original plans lost to history, these replicas had to be based on photographic evidence and written documents; they are so close to the originals that it is virtually impossible to tell them apart, even after carefully scrutinizing historical photos of their prototypes. They are painted as accurately as possible despite the fact that the colors of the original locomotives are not known with
A Work of Art: Resplendent in the original paint scheme, this operating replica of Union Pacific No. 119 is used in re-enactments of the joining of the rails at the Golden Spike National Historic Site, Promontory, Utah.

certainty. When the locomotives were constructed, their bright colors startled all observers. Victorian-era locomotives were simply stunning, especially given the way their colors stand out in the sage-covered landscape. Interestingly, portions of the Jupiter (especially its tender) were originally painted in red, as that seemed to be the most likely original color—until an article in an early Sacramento newspaper was recently discovered, revealing the color to be blue. Given the National Park Service’s interest in accuracy, the color was quickly changed to the bright royal blue originally noted in the builders’ general literature on locomotive paints.

One question that plagues those involved in the Golden Spike Historical Site is just how much of the original Promontory Summit should be reconstructed? Currently (2008), the interpretation focuses on the locomotives and the remainder left to interpretation in the visitor center. However, in the late 1970s, the interpretation of Promontory’s “Hell on Wheels” period was achieved, at least in part, by the furnishing of the Union Pacific ticket office and the Red Cloud Saloon (fig. 9–11).
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Even though these “were not as accurate as hoped, in scale, location or furnishing”—as a National Park Service historian diplomatically put it—
— they were popular with visitors.

This search for accuracy is, and remains, a real concern. The National Park Service is constantly raising the bar in hopes of providing the visiting public with the most authentic, which is to say accurate, environment at Promontory. Of course, there are limits, only some of which pertain to accuracy. Imagine, for a moment, recreating Promontory as it was in 1869 for the public. Although early claims of its wildness (and violent nature) may have been exaggerated by travelers then, consider
the impact of offering the public “the meanest breakfast any one ever sat down to: sour bread, sour hash, and sour hot cakes without syrup”—as a reporter for the Elko Independent described food at Promontory in 1869.\textsuperscript{15} Better (or worse) yet, envision a re-enactment of “a motley crew of rowdies, blackguards, gamblers, and abandoned women, [who] made [the] night hideous with their drunken orgies”—as the British traveler Frederick Whymper described a sleepless layover at Promontory in his essay “From Ocean to Ocean—The Pacific Railroad” at about the time the rails were to be joined.\textsuperscript{16}

To ensure that Promontory was appreciated in its geographic context, the right of way on both sides of the Golden Spike National Historic Site was also included. Thus, the site is a sinuous strip of land along which several larger rectangular areas cluster (fig. 9–12). Beginning at the base of the Promontory Mountains at Blue Creek, the 200–foot-wide strip follows the railroad grade uphill along the east face of the Promontory Range. In the area of spectacular cuts and fills, the strip widens into a pattern of interlocking rectangles. This, of course, was contested ground between Central Pacific and Union Pacific crews who probably performed the most extensive, and expensive, of the duplicative work anywhere along the entire transcontinental railroad here. The sites here are featured on the National Park Service’s informative brochure titled Golden Spike National Historic Site, Utah, National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior. An automobile tour of sites on the East Grade is part of the historic site, though it can be experienced on
foot as well as by car. This section includes the Big Fill and Big Trestle sites and Chinese Arch.

Continuing from this point westward, the historic site again constricts to a 200-foot-wide band as it runs into the broad vale where the famous golden spike was driven at Promontory Summit. Here, the site widens into a square that includes the joining of the rails site and the visitor center. It is here that tourists have the opportunity to dramatically witness the joining of the rails after viewing a film outlining the building of the transcontinental railroad. After watching the movie, the group sits facing the screen, whereupon curtains open to reveal the two full-size locomotives outside in the Utah landscape. Invariably, “Ooohs” and “Aahhs” are heard. Tellingly, the audience faces north, and the Central Pacific Jupiter is on the left (west) while No. 119 is on the right (east)—a duplication of Russell’s now-legendary 1869 photographs.

At the visitor center and nearby, the question becomes: which time period is to be represented? 1869? If so, the visitor center itself becomes an issue, as it was located with little reference to the period when the golden spike was driven. For example, the location where the ceremony is re-enacted appears to be some distance—possibly several hundred feet—from the original location. However, the construction activity about thirty years ago at the visitor center resulted in considerable alteration of the site. This is problematical today because the emphasis is on accuracy (as well as correct artifact provenience). The ambitious construction, however, removed many traces of the original alignments as well as foundation locations of buildings. Similarly, the presence of the obelisk-shaped marker (fig. 9–13), which was moved about 150 feet to the visitor center represents a conundrum. True, it is located in a convenient place for those entering the center to experience it, but the marker has been separated from its original setting. The problem is all the more apparent when one realizes that the marker dates from 1916—about fifty years after the original ceremony, which is depicted here daily during the summer months.

The challenge, then, is to reconstruct Promontory using as much evidence as possible. Just as deconstructing photographs can help us understand the Promontory of 1869, images can be used to help in the reconstruction. Given the presence of maps depicting the site at various time periods, along with historical photographs, it may be possible to reconstruct vignettes of Promontory at different time periods using carefully coordinated photogrammetry and GIS rubber-sheeting techniques. Still, the construction at the visitor center has compromised a third possibility—the anchoring of those images to actual traces of material elements such as foundation corners or old roadbeds.
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From the visitor center at Promontory Summit westward, the strip again narrows to 200 feet, occupying the Central Pacific right of way through Promontory Hollow. The old Union Pacific grade lies south of the Central Pacific grade here. Continuing westward on the old Central Pacific grade, which is a gravel automobile road, the historic site snakes northwestward downgrade over the roadbed along which Central Pacific crews laid a record ten miles of track in one day (April 28, 1869). A replica of that historic sign is located here. The Golden Spike Historic Site ends about a mile from Victory Camp, where Central Pacific crews had lunch on that noteworthy day when they laid the ten miles of track.

From there westward, a four-wheel drive road following the old Central Pacific grade becomes part of the Bureau of Land Management.
(BLM) Transcontinental Railroad Back Country Byway. Whereas the Golden Spike National Historic Site offers the most easily accessible portions of the old railway grades, and also features the major interpretive facilities, exploring elsewhere along the old railway grades on BLM land is more difficult, involving considerable care and planning. However, a number of the locales, for example, Seco, are well marked with BLM signs outlining the site’s history. Moreover, the roadbed, though eroded and impassable in several places, has been the focus of BLM’s efforts to create an interpretive trail for the serious history-oriented hiker. The trail is only interpreted using a small one-page brochure now, but could be expanded to include a more in depth natural and cultural history component involving both Native peoples and later arrivals. The geology and vegetation of the area, so important to the line over the range, could also be interpreted. A good place to start is with BLM’s 1994 report called Rails East to Promontory: the Utah Stations. This trail currently begins at Rozel, but could be expanded to start in the vicinity of the Bear River Bay along which the old right of way is still visible, continue over Promontory Summit, and then run to Lucin. Along the current BLM portion west of Rozel may be seen the remains of old railroad culverts and short trestles (fig. 9–14) as well as classic Utah ghost town
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sites such as Terrace and Kelton (fig. 9–15). The area along the marshy shore of the Great Salt Lake from near Corinne to Blue Creek, however, is also rich in both natural and cultural history features.

The crown jewel—the current Golden Spike National Historic Site—would be the centerpiece of the new trail. Over the range and into the vast BLM lands west of the Promontory Mountains, serious hikers can experience the dusty trail to Kelton, of which little above ground remains but about which so much could be presented. From Kelton, the trail could extend southwestward to the fabled Red Dome Pass and Matlin, along some of the most rugged and remote topography traversed by the railroad. The trail could then continue to Terrace, where the present modest signage could be expanded to include maps/station plans of communities there and along the old route to Lucin.

Hikers using the entire trail from near Corinne to Lucin would need good maps to better comprehend the nature of the countryside. Fortunately, the entire area is covered by USGS topographic maps at a scale of 1:24,000, though some are still primitive in that they include only photographic overlays and not detailed contour mapping. Oddly, the abandoned Central Pacific line here is not indicated on some of
these maps and would have to be added. For interpretive purposes, these new topographic maps could be compared to copies of the actual railroad survey maps. If this “Pacific Railroad Hiking Trail” were to ever materialize, however, there would have to be caveats not unlike the warnings on the maps of early wagon roads. West of Promontory, especially from Rozel to Lucin, the trail is often miles away from well-traveled roads. This is hazardous, rough country intended for only the more serious and experienced of hikers and trail bike riders. One serious misstep or miscalculation here could bring disaster, for although the lights of cities across the Great Salt Lake are clearly visible from many places, that distance is not traversable. The Great Salt Lake is still a major obstacle, and the surrounding desert here is still as unforgiving as any in the North America. The trail, though, enables those who experience it to more fully understand the challenges faced by the early survey teams and roadbed graders of the Pacific Railroad.

One more caveat is in order about exploring the old Promontory line. The task of seriously interpreting the physical remains of the railroad here is threatened by well meaning, but overly enthusiastic, collectors. In the book *Right-of-Way: A Guide to Abandoned Railroads in the United States*, Waldo Nielsen asks: “Who knows what treasure can be found along the right-of-way or in the vicinity of abandoned stations?” Adding that “[t]his book should be useful to the insulator collector, the bottle collector and the treasure hunter,” Nielsen gives a green light to those who would indiscriminately collect artifacts along old railroad grades. In the section on Utah, Nielsen identifies the Promontory line, listing the section length from Lucin to Dathol as 122 miles and from Corinne to Ogden as 25 miles, both sections abandoned between 1937 and 1944.19 Although it appears impossible to stop overzealous collectors, one hopes that they can be educated to respect the sites and artifacts, for an artifact removed without any indication as to its context becomes little more than an interesting curiosity now unable to answer the most important questions about the site and the people who lived along and traveled over it. This is true for both public and private lands, including that important six-mile-long section of the line from Corinne to Stinking Springs at the northeastern edge of the Great Salt Lake now owned by the Golden Spike Heritage Foundation.

The event at Promontory Summit lives in both the interpretation/re-enactments at the Golden Spike National Historic Site and on the screen—both large and small. In 2005, the TNT television miniseries “Into the West” portrayed the drama of the West’s settlement from about 1830 to 1890. One crucial aspect of that drama, naturally, was the building and opening of the transcontinental railroad. The first appearance
of the railroad theme was portrayed in episode 3, “Hell on Wheels” (on July 8–10, 2005), which covered the start of construction in Omaha and Sacramento, California. As roadbed grading begins in the Sierra foothills, a labor dispute with Irish workers leads a railroad official to suggest that the Chinese in San Francisco be used as track workers—to the chagrin of a racist construction foreman, who declares that he will not work with any Chinese. Like many dramatic TV shows of its time, “Into the West” featured several themes (such as Native American-settler and other social-ethnic conflicts) in one episode. As the Native Americans fight for their dwindling lands, the railroad development theme continues at strategic intervals. In “Into the West,” the railroad serves as a metaphor for the relentless march of technology and civilization across the West. After part of the episode treats the Sand Creek Massacre, the construction of the Union Pacific railroad at “North Platte, 300 miles west of Omaha October 1866” is shown as the pivotal location where construction is marching westward on the Great Plains. At North Platte, a young man says that there won’t be much left of the West after the railroad tames it. Although “Into the West” presupposes that the railroad would eliminate the Indians through conflict (and conflict did indeed occur on the Union Pacific), it is a popular misconception that the Indians were annihilated.

Generally, for each Union Pacific scene, “Into the West” features a Central Pacific counterpart. The next railroad scene at “Cape Horn, Northern California” portrays Chinese workers defying the ramparts of the Sierra Nevada as they help blast a right of way across the mountains. After another segue to Crazy Horse’s elimination of soldiers in Wyoming, the action at “Donner Summit, 7000 feet above sea level 1867” is portrayed. Immediately, the Union Pacific at North Platte, Nebraska, appears, and the viewer senses that both railroads are edging closer together. A 4-4-0 locomotive and bunk/work car at North Platte provides a view of the type of equipment the Union Pacific used on construction trains. The next scene features the successful completion of a tunnel in the Sierra Nevada. After Indians sign a treaty on the Plains, the Union Pacific is again featured at North Platte, where an interpersonal drama between a young man, his angry father, and a young woman occurs. Cheyenne, Wyoming—reportedly about halfway on the route—appears next as the Union Pacific work train moves west. The competition between Central Pacific and Union Pacific becomes apparent at “Humboldt Sink, Great Basin Nevada 1868” as Donovan must keep the Chinese workers building the line despite increasing strife. Meanwhile, in Wyoming, tensions mount as Indians seek to expand back to their former territories.
As the conclusion of this episode nears after the railroads have frantically built toward each other, a man announces that the rails will meet “at Promontory.” Another man observes, “That’s Mormon Country, and they say brother Brigham approves of the railroad.” The two railroad lines finally meet at the site that a title proclaims to be “Promontory Point [sic], Utah, May 10, 1869.” Naturally, the union of the rails provides an opportunity for “Into the West” to offer some pithy social commentary. For example, it highlights the new type of westerner who will transform the region; not the hard-driving pioneer or track layer, but rather the urbanite who knows how to provide people with the goods and services they need. As the pompous speeches proclaim, “We are a great people,” who have been able to bridge the continent. “Into the West” gives the victory a worker’s voice: As the railroad brass take the credit, a half white/half Indian track worker picks a splinter of wood out of a crosstie, hands it to a Chinese worker, and adds a concluding line that at least we know who really built the railroad.

That, of course, is the message that has always resonated at Promontory Summit. It was a celebration of capitalism and western progress, but even observers at the time noted the accomplishments of the workers, Chinese and white alike. They also know that the railroad, and all it represented, will further affect Native Americans. Similarly, the challenge then as now is to tell the story as fairly as possible—a balance not always easy to achieve.

In the 2007 film, Night at the Museum, one of the dioramas that come to life after hours is a construction scene on the Pacific Railroad. Two locomotives are shown; one is the No. 119, and the other appears to be the Jupiter (or a similar bonnet-stacked 4–4–0). The railroad under construction is a single track line through desolate country, and the scene includes a brigade of Chinese workers grading roadbed and laying track. This diorama is titled “Wild West,” and it is part of what the diorama’s lead character (a miniaturized cowboy played by Owen Wilson) calls “Manifest Destiny.” This movie is a spoof on the stodgy world of the museum, but it is telling that the scene depicting the Wild West features the feverish railroad construction that put Promontory on the map in 1869. In our collective memory as Americans, Promontory signifies an event that both expanded the nation and unified people living on both coasts.

Promontory’s story is not only about people and technology but about the place itself. Like the people here, and the technology of railroading, the place has changed considerably over the more than 160 years. Perhaps the most evocative way to observe this is from the air.
As noted at the beginning of this book, travelers today on flights over Promontory Summit can look down at the area from around 35,000 feet. There, visible in a single glance, the forlorn north-south-trending Promontory Mountains jut into the Great Salt Lake. At the eastern edge of this view, along the Wasatch Front, are oasis-like benches densely settled with farms and communities. Farther to the west, but east of Promontory, a large industrial facility grabs one’s attention. This is the Thiokol Company’s plant, and it has an interesting recent history.

In 1956, after considering several sites in Utah, Thiokol selected the area near Blue Creek to build solid fuel rocket motors. Thiokol chose this site because it was a considerably safe distance from urban areas, and “because raw materials were close at hand from the Intermountain West, the labor market was advantageous, and railroad transportation was available.” Although Thiokol would use a portion of the Central/Southern Pacific line west of Brigham City, Union Pacific now operated that line; ironically, the railroad was a visible player in luring Thiokol to Utah. Most people involved in the deliberations recognized the symbolism of the plant’s location, as one observer put it, “across the road from an old railroad facility, Lampoo Junction, built to service the railroad that formed the original transcontinental railroad completed in 1869 at nearby Promontory Summit.” This meant that the Promontory line was again front and center in a transportation race, this one ultimately culminating in getting men to the moon in 1969—almost exactly a century after the completion of the transcontinental railroad. Like that earlier venture, the Promontory plant site offered a number of advantages that placed it ahead of other locales in Utah. Interestingly, although Thiokol’s presence was reduced after the end of the Cold War in 1991, a recent decision (2005) to launch a second manned mission to the moon ensures that the Thiokol Promontory plant will see renewed activity. This means that the soulful wail of the whistles of Jupiter and No. 119 will continue to be interrupted by the thunderous roar of rocket engines being tested at nearby Thiokol.

Continuing to look westward from the Thiokol plant, an air traveler glimpses the stark Promontory Range looming out of Great Salt Lake and stretching northward to a saddle between what are, in effect, two mountain ranges in one. It is here at this saddle that history was made on May 10, 1869. It is amazing to contemplate just how little of the original infrastructure along the railroad can be seen from this high altitude. However, there below, one can glimpse—if barely—the scars of the abandoned rights of way. Of Promontory Summit, little or nothing can be seen from this high altitude except a gentle cleft in mountains where the railroad originally crossed over the range to the bleak, alkali-riddled
Over the Range

land to the west. Away from the nearly imaginary line where the railroad once ran, into the higher country at the base of the Raft River Range, the large gridiron-patterned mosaic of Curlew Valley’s wheat fields in an otherwise desert-like land give some order to the chaotic wilderness. They are a reminder that this railroad helped shape the local economy and landscape as well as connected distant places.

To the south, as if drawn with a straightedge, the modern line of the Union Pacific railroad cuts across the Great Salt Lake on a bee-line course from Ogden on the east to the desert wilds where Utah meets Nevada. That straight line is, of course, the Lucin Cutoff, now also known as the Salt Lake Causeway (fig. 9–16). More than a century old now, it looks surprisingly modern. However, the cutoff is occasionally threatened with abandonment in favor of other routes less vulnerable to the expensive temperamental challenges posed by the Great Salt Lake. Therefore, even though that straight-line causeway is a more recent artifact on the land than the old railroad grades at Promontory, it too, is part of the story and a reminder that railroads maximize profits as they minimize obstructions. The Lucin Cutoff, then, is actually no less significant an artifact than Promontory Summit, for its presence signifies the beginning of the end of the original line. That line, although

Fig. 9–16
Lucin Cutoff, now also known as the Salt Lake Causeway, remains a marvel of railroad engineering, and the cause of Promontory’s decline.
long gone, still has a hold on the popular imagination. It also continues to raise questions about both the people and places it shaped.

For its part, the early Promontory Summit line of the Pacific Railroad is a ghost railroad, but one small portion of it still sees (2008) some sporadic railroad activity. The active rails reach westward from Brigham City to Corinne, which is today the literal end of the line. Westward from Corinne, with the exception of the recreated trackage at the Golden Spike National Historic Site, only abandoned roadbeds mark the rights of way. East of Corinne, though, slow-way freight trains can be seen wading along the weed-flanked right of way as they serve some of the industries in the Corinne to Brigham City area (fig. 9–17). Significantly, the locomotives hauling these trains bear the familiar Union Pacific colors and lettering—a reminder of that railroad’s ultimate victory in the corporate battle that began in the early 1860s and lasted until almost the end of the twentieth century.

Today, the site at Promontory Summit is miles from any railroad connection to the outside world. The fact that Promontory still resonates with the public is clear from the symbolism on Utah’s new 25–cent piece (fig. 9–18). Released in October 2007, the Utah quarter might have featured sites associated with the state’s fabled Mormon history—the beehive, Salt
Lake Temple, seagulls, and the like. Instead, the committee selecting the imagery chose the meeting of the rails as the singular event in the state’s history. Not surprisingly, then, Promontory lives on as the quintessential symbol of union or unification. The fact that the original ceremony took place in the Victorian West may add to its charm but does not restrict the event and place to the past. Promontory Summit is still relevant to people in the twenty-first century—the enduring question being which part of Promontory’s long history we choose to remember, and portray.

As evidence of this, consider the May 10, 2008 ceremony held at the 139th anniversary of the big event in 1869. To rectify the absence of Chinese people in the 1869 photograph, NPS deliberately staged a photo opportunity involving representatives of the Utah Organization of Chinese Americans and their guests from China. Under a brilliant blue sky, as the locomotives’ pilots nearly touched and re-enactors in period dress posed, so too did Chinese Americans and their guests (fig. 9–19). When compared to the 1869 photograph, the basic armature of people and machines is in place. Now, however, the centerpiece is the brightly dressed Chinese, proudly posing for their place in the new—but really old—history.

**Fig. 9–18**
On Utah’s commemoritive state quarter, which was issued in October 2007, the joining of the rails remains the signature event in state history.
Under a brilliant blue sky, the May 10, 2008, re-enactment of the joining of the rails exactly 139 years earlier rectified an oversight in the original photos as members of the Utah Organization of Chinese Americans and their guests from China now proudly posed for the camera.