



Four Special Spikes



The Golden Spike Ceremony, which took place May 10, 1869, was held at Promontory Summit, Utah Territory. During that Ceremony, four special spikes were presented.

THE GOLDEN SPIKE

San Francisco contractor David Hewes, friend of Central Pacific President Leland Stanford, was disappointed to discover no one had prepared a commemorative item for the completion of the transcontinental railroad, which was scheduled to be finished on May 8, 1869. Unable to persuade anyone to finance the casting of a solid gold or silver section of rail, Hewes decided upon a more practical token. Using about \$400 of his own gold, he had the William T. Garatt Foundry of San Francisco cast a golden spike. The spike was 5 5/8 inches long, weighed 14.03 ounces and was made of 17.6 carat gold. Only about \$350 worth of gold, however, was used to make the actual spike. The remainder was left attached to the spike in a large sprue.

After casting, the golden spike was engraved on all four sides and the top. Two sides bore the names of railroad officers and directors. Another side was engraved, "The Pacific Railroad ground broken Jan 8th 1863 and completed May 8th 1869." The fourth side was engraved, "May God continue the unity of our country as the railroad unites the two great Oceans of the world. Presented David Hewes San Francisco." The top of the spike was simply engraved, "The Last Spike."

NEVADA'S SILVER SPIKE

Unlike the Golden Spike, Nevada's silver spike was forged instead of cast. The spike was ordered on May 5, 1869 by Railroad Commissioner and candidate for Governor of the new State of Nevada, Mr. F. A. Tritle. Virginia City assayers E. Ruhling & Co. provided 25 ounces of silver which Robert Lodge of the Dowling Blacksmith Shop forged into a rather rough, unpolished, 6-

inch long, 10 1/2 ounce spike bearing only the assayers stamp. The spike was rushed twenty miles to Reno, barely in time to be given to Stanford aboard his special train heading to Promontory Summit for the ceremony marking the completion of the transcontinental railroad.

ARIZONA'S GOLD AND SILVER SPIKE

The spike presented by the Arizona Territory was a composite made from plating an ordinary 6-inch iron spike with gold on the head and silver on the shaft. The territory's newly appointed Governor, Anson P.K. Safford, had the spike made, but when and by whom is unknown. The

highly polished spike was engraved, "Ribbed with iron clad in silver and crowned with gold Arizona presents her offering to the enterprise that has banded a continent and dictated a pathway to commerce. Presented by Governor Safford."

A SECOND GOLDEN SPIKE

A second golden spike was ordered by Frederick Marriott, proprietor of the San Francisco *News Letter* newspaper company. This 5-inch long, 9 1/2 ounce spike, made from about \$200 worth of gold, was inscribed, "With this spike the San Francisco News Letter offers its homage to the great work which has joined the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. This month-May, 1869."

A SPECIAL HAMMER

L. W. Coe, president of San Francisco's Pacific Express Company, had tool maker Conroy & O'Conner manufacture a special spike hammer, or maul, for the Golden Spike Ceremony. The maul was then taken to Vanderslice & Co. of San Francisco, where it was heavily plated with silver and stamped with the manufacturer's name.

THE LAURELWOOD TIE

West Evens, tie contractor for Central Pacific, had San Francisco billiard table manufacturer Strahle & Hughes prepare a highly polished tie made from California laurelwood. The 7 1/2 foot long, 8 x 6 inch tie bore a centered silver plaque marked, "The last tie laid on completion

of the Pacific Railroad, May, 1869." The plaque also listed the officers and directors of Central Pacific along with the names of the tie maker and donor. Four holes were drilled into the tie in order to accommodate the ceremonial spikes.

THE CEREMONY

Before the start of the Golden Spike Ceremony, workers brought the laurelwood tie from Stanford's coach, placed it on the grade, and laid the last rail sections across it. The Ceremony then commenced, emceed by wealthy Sacramento banker Edgar Mills. An invocation was offered by the Reverend Dr. John Todd of Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Presentation of the spikes and ties followed.

After an ardously verbose speech, Dr. H. W. Harkness, a Sacramento newspaper publisher and editor, presented the two golden spikes to Leland Stanford. Union Pacific Vice-President Thomas Durant was then presented Nevada's silver spike by Mr. Tritle and Arizona's spike by Governor Safford. Stanford then offered a rousing speech. He was to have been followed by Durant, but due to Durant's severe headache (most likely a hangover from the previous night's party in Ogden), Union Pacific's Chief Engineer, General Grenville Dodge, took Durant's place and gave a few short, but

enthusiastic words. Mr. Coe then presented the silver plated maul, which Stanford and Durant used to gently tap the precious metal spikes, so as to leave no mark upon either the spikes, or the maul.

Immediately thereafter, the precious metal spikes and laurelwood tie were removed and replaced with a pine tie, into which three ordinary iron spikes were driven. A fourth iron spike, and a regular iron spike hammer, were both wired to the transcontinental telegraph line so that the Nation could "hear" the blows as the spike was driven.

Stanford took a mighty swing at the spike, and struck the tie instead. Durant, still not feeling too well, took a feeble swing, and did not even hit the tie! Finally, a regular rail worker drove home the last spike, and the telegrapher, W.N. Shilling of Western Union, sent the long awaited message, "D-O-N-E." The time was 12:47 p.m., Monday, May 10, 1869.

A SCATTERING OF HISTORY

Following a brief time on display, the Golden Spike was returned to David Hewes. In 1892, Hewes donated his extensive rare art collection, including the Golden Spike, to the museum of newly built Leland Stanford Junior University in Palo Alto, California.

Nevada's silver spike was temporarily returned to Virginia City jewelers Nye & Co., who polished the spike and engraved one side, "To Leland Stanford President of the Central Pacific Railroad. To the iron of the East and the gold of the West Nevada adds her link of silver to span the continent and wed the oceans." The spike was then delivered to Stanford and eventually placed along with the Golden Spike in the Stanford University museum.

It is unknown what happened to Arizona Territory's spike immediately following the Ceremony. Today, it is owned by the Museum of the City of New York.

The whereabouts of the second gold spike is unknown. It has been speculated that the spike was given to one of the Union Pacific dignitaries, but there is no mention of the spike in any memoirs. It is also possible that the spike was returned to the *News Letter*. If so, its fate may well have been the same as the newspaper company, when, in 1906, the San Francisco earthquake and subsequent fire destroyed the *News Letter* building.

The silver plated spike maul was also given to Leland Stanford and became part of the Stanford University museum. The famous laurelwood tie remained on display in Sacramento until 1890. By then, Central Pacific had been reorganized into Southern Pacific, and the tie was taken to the railroad's San Francisco offices in the Flood Building. Unfortunately, the building and tie also fell victim to the great earthquake and fire of 1906.

The large sprue attached to the Golden Spike was removed shortly before the Ceremony. David Hewes took the sprue and had it made into four small rings and seven, one-inch long spike watchfobs. The rings were presented to Leland Stanford, Oakes Ames (Union Pacific President), President U.S. Grant, and Secretary of State William H. Seward. Several dignitaries and Hewes' relatives were presented watchfobs, including nephew Tilden G. Abbott, whose fob is on display at Golden Spike National Historic Site.



This watch fob, which was presented to Tilden Abbot, is on display at Golden Spike National Historic Site.