

Proclamation to Commemorate the 150th
Anniversary of the Completion of the
Transcontinental Railroad

November 20, 2019

One of the most iconic and life-altering events in America's history:

On May 10, 1869, the last spike of the Transcontinental Railroad was ceremoniously driven in at Promontory Summit, Utah, joining the Central Pacific Railroad and the Union Pacific Railroads to form one continuous railroad to connecting the east to the west.



MAY 10, 2019, Building the Transcontinental Railroad: How 20,000 Chinese Immigrants Made It Happen. At first railroad companies were reluctant to hire Chinese workers, but the immigrants soon proved to be vital. LESLEY KENNEDY

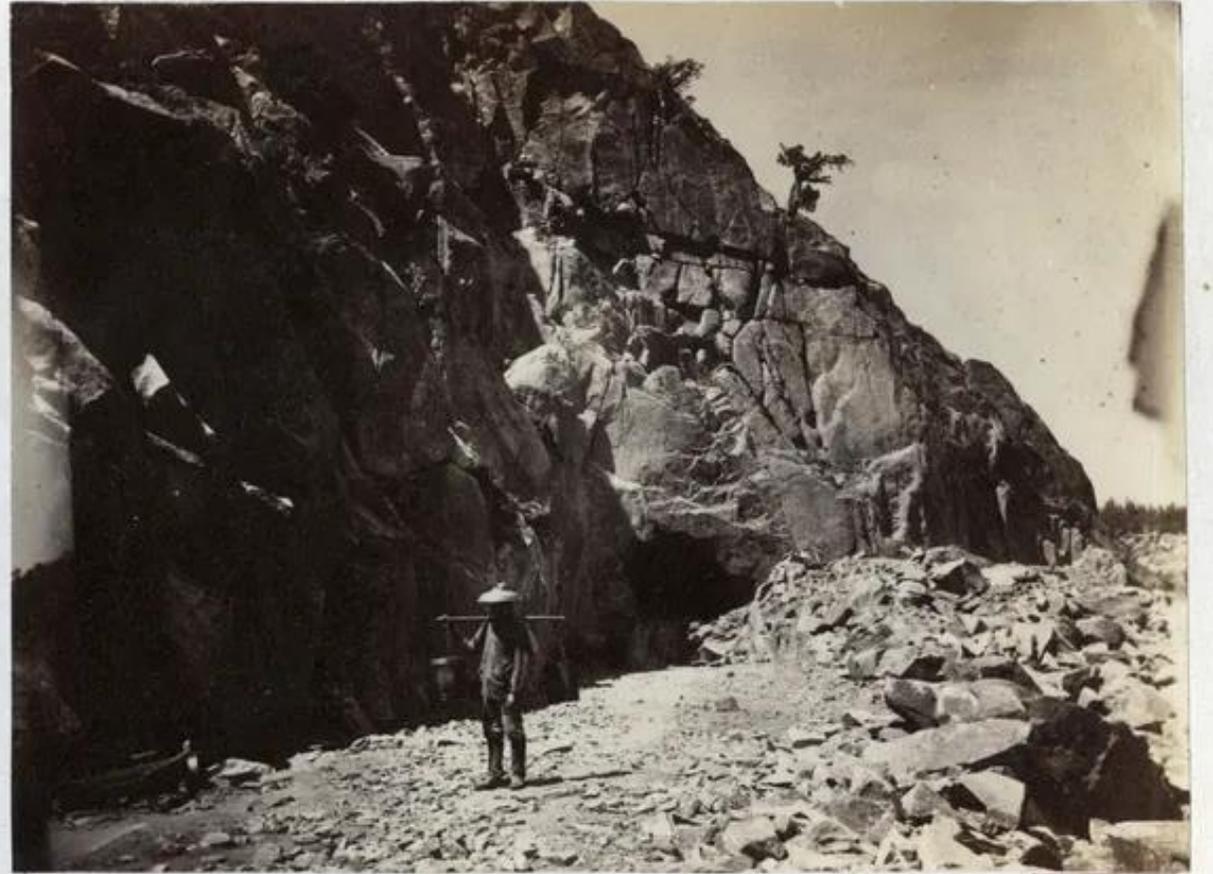


Railroad workers construct a section of the First Transcontinental Railroad on the Humboldt Plains of Nevada. (Image credit: Alfred A. Hart Photographs, 1862-1869, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries)



Chinese workers building a cut and a bank at Sailor's Spur in the Sierra foothills for the Central Pacific Railroad in California, 1866. Underwood Archives/Getty Images

Taken between 1862 and 1869, a Chinese laborer works at a tunnel heading above Donner Lake on the western summit of the Transcontinental Railroad in Northern California.





Workers blast a 60-foot-deep cut above Alta, California (1862-1869). Image credit: Hart, Stanford Univ.



Chinese workers near an opening of the Summit Tunnel of the Central Pacific Road (1862-69), Hart, Stanford Univ.



Chinese camp and construction train in Nevada when building of the first transcontinental railroad was being speeded across the state by the Central Pacific. Bettmann Archive/Getty Images





Winters were especially dangerous: avalanches would sweep away camps of Chinese workers, carrying many to their death. Twenty workers died in one avalanche, and individuals disappeared in smaller snow slides. Some frozen bodies were found in the spring with their shovels or picks still in their hands.





A man passed under an arch formation where Chinese laborers used to camp out during the construction of the railroad. Credit...Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Leland Stanford, president of Central Pacific, former California governor and founder of Stanford University, told Congress in 1865, that the majority of the railroad labor force were Chinese. Without them," he said, "it would be impossible to complete the western portion of this great national enterprise, within the time required by the Acts of Congress."

At the 100th anniversary, U.S. Transportation Secretary John A Volpe:

“Who else but Americans could drill ten tunnels in mountains 30 feet deep in snow?

Who else but Americans could chisel through miles of solid granite?

Who else but Americans could have laid ten miles of track in 12 hours?”



Connie Young Yu, who spoke during the opening remarks.
Credit...Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

According to 5/14/69 reporting by the Chinese-American journal East West and quoting from a Gold Spike committeeman:

“...The Chinese wanted five minutes, the Irish wanted five minutes...but people come only to watch the reenactment of the Central [train engine] meeting with the Union Pacific...and to watch John Wayne.”

The popular movie actor, along with the dozens of politicians, was introduced to the crowd and television network cameras...

on May 10, invited by the state of Utah and the National Park Service, she stood on stage in front of 20,000 people gathered for a triumphant celebration, and opened the day's ceremonies by saying, "My great-grandfather, Lee Wong Sang, was one of the thousands of unsung heroes, building the railroad across the Sierra Nevada mountains, laying tracks through to Utah, uniting the country by rail. Many descendants of Chinese railroad workers are here today."



Members of Chinese-American communities, including descendants of railroad workers, attended the ceremony on May 10, 2019.

Credit - Chang W. Lee/The New York Times



"A generation which ignores history has no past and no future."

Robert Heinlein

Chinese American World War II Veterans to be honored with Congressional Gold Medal

Mr. Fred C. Lee was presented a framed copy of the confirmation letter from the Chinese American WWII Veterans Recognition Project that informed him that his eligibility to receive the Congressional Gold Medal (CGM) was confirmed.

The CGM will not be presented until the Speaker of the House officially holds the CGM Award Ceremony at Capitol Hill in 2020.



“History is not the past. It is the present.
We carry our history with us.
We are our history.”

James Baldwin