



Golden Spike Day

A Readers' Theater Play

By Sheryl Hinman

Scene opens with characters gradually coming in from various areas to assemble in a line facing the audience.

Newsboy 1: Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Today, May 10th, 1869 a golden spike will unite the America from coast to coast!

Newsboy 2: Extra! Extra! Read all about it! The Union Pacific and the Central Pacific railroads will meet face to face at Promontory Summit, Utah.

Man 1: Hey, I'll take one of those newspapers. We're going down in the history books today!

Telegraph Operator: (enters) Where's my spot? I've got to send the final message to President Grant. This is the first news event to be covered coast to coast.

Newsboy 2: We're going to be selling a lot of newspapers today. I've already been back to the editor twice to pick up more copies.

Telegraph Operator: When I send out my telegraph message, whistles will blow in San Francisco, the Liberty Bell will ring in Philadelphia, and there's even going to be a ball in Washington, DC.

Man 2: In my home town of Chicago, my sister wrote to tell me that the whole place will be decorated with flags and there's going to be a big parade.

Telegraph Operator: A lot of people will be gathered around the newspaper offices today so they can start the celebration. I want to make sure everything goes right!

Man 1: See that table over there by Governor Leland Stanford? That's where we set up your equipment this morning.

Man 2: Come right this way, sir. The telegraph wire will be attached to the head of the last spike and another wire will be attached to a silver headed maul. The

whole nation will know when this spike is driven home. (Operator and the men move toward the center area.)

Mrs. Shay: (A woman and two children enter and take their place in the crowd.) Come along, children. We want to get a good view of the last tie being laid. Your pa is so proud to be part of the crew that finished this transcontinental railroad. Forty-six months from start to finish.

Mary Shay: There he is! He's with the rest of the "ironmen" crew. I'm going to write down everything I see and hear for my journal. I want to remember it all!

Mrs. Crocker: (Turning toward Mrs. Shay) Oh, hello, I don't think we've met. I'm Mrs. Crocker. My husband Charles is the man who made the bet that his crew could lay 10 miles of track in a single day. When he told me about the bet, I was shocked! The average amount of track laid in a day was only 2 miles. But my husband said we had nothing to worry about--he had faith in his men.

Patrick Shay: And they did it! My pa said that when they finished the day, each man had lifted over 125 tons of iron rails into place.

Mrs. Crocker: They did indeed. They started at 7 a.m. and when those men laid down their tools at 7 p.m., they had laid 10 miles and 56 feet of track. Nobody will ever beat that record!

Mrs. Shay: Our Central Pacific men showed what they could do. Mr. Thomas Durant of the Union Pacific lost his \$10,000 bet with your husband. And our men sure appreciated their bonus money!

Mary: Pa wanted us to be here for the driving of the last spike. Is it really made of gold?

Mrs. Crocker: There are four special spikes: Arizona contributed one of iron, silver and gold, Nevada sent one of silver, a San Francisco newspaper supplied one of gold worth \$200, but the last one is the most precious. A rich San Francisco man named David Hewes was so proud of this American achievement that he commissioned a spike made of high-grade gold with

inscriptions on its side. It says, “May God continue the unity of our country as the railroad unites the two great oceans of the world.”

Mr. Crocker: (Joins his wife. Tips his hat to Mrs. Shay) Good day, ladies. Mrs. Shay, your husband pointed you out. You and your children are going to have a rare treat today. See those eight Chinese workers in the blue jackets? In a few minutes they will be bringing out the final pair of rails. Then, they’ll set them on a polished wood tie.

Mrs. Crocker: It takes a long time because the officials want photos of every step.

Mr. Crocker: It’s a good thing that we did not have to do that during the 10-mile day challenge!

Mrs. Crocker: Charles, the construction supervisor and his wife have invited the eight Chinese men to dine with all the officers in their boarding car after the ceremony. I’m looking forward to meeting them.

Patrick: (Sounds of some clanging and pounding.) My pa said the work was really hard going through the mountains. He said the Central Pacific crews built 15 tunnels in all.

Mr. Crocker: He’s right. The longest one ran 1,659 feet. Without the Chinese workers’ knowledge of dynamite, I don’t know if we would have been able to finish so quickly. It was dangerous, back-breaking work. Your pa’s Civil War military training came in handy too. The ex-Union soldiers made some of our most valuable crew members. They were used to working as a team.

Mrs. Shay: Oh, look, Governor Stanford is stepping up to drive the golden spike.

Governor Stanford: Gentlemen, the railroad companies accept with pride and satisfaction these silver and gold tokens of your appreciation. These gifts will receive a fitting place in the history of this road and the uniting of our country east to west and north to south. Allow me to express the hope that the great

importance of this undertaking will be in all respects fully realized. (He takes the maul and steps forward.)

Mr. Crocker: Watch the telegraph operator, children. He's going to be sending out the message when the last spike is done.

Patrick: The governor swings...and he misses! (turns to sister and laughs)

Mary: Mr. Durant is going to give it a try. He looks stronger. (turns to her brother) Oh, no! He missed too!

Patrick: Look! They gave pa the hammer. (sounds of hammering) He did it!

Telegrapher: (Begins the signal) D O N E! (Cheers and applause.)

Newsboy 1: Extra! Extra! Read all about it! President Grant sends a telegram congratulating the crews!

Newsboy 2: Here's the latest edition! The first transcontinental train will be bringing tea all the way from Japan to New York City! The post office delivers its first mail by rail.

Mary Shay: This changes everything!

Mr. Crocker: You are so right. You, Mary Shay, may one day sit in your New York City parlor eating strawberries grown in California. And you, Patrick Shay, may be working on this very railroad your father helped to build.

Mary: I want to travel all over America and write about what I see.

Mrs. Shay: Now you can go coast to coast in 10 days!

(Softly, music begins to play. America the Beautiful. Characters step forward to bow.)