

The Legendary Last Spike: Uniting a Nation Through Railways

When it comes to monumental achievements in Canadian history, one cannot overlook the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in 1885. This transformative project, sometimes referred to as "The Last Spike," not only connected the vast expanse of Canada from coast to coast but also played a significant role in shaping the nation as we know it today. Let's delve into the captivating story behind this remarkable feat of engineering and the historical context surrounding it.

The Birth of an Ambitious Vision

During the late 19th century, Canada was facing numerous challenges in terms of national unity and transportation. The idea of a transcontinental railway had been discussed for several years, but it was only under the leadership of Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first prime minister, that this dream began to turn into a reality.

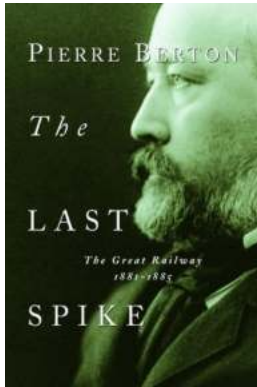
Macdonald recognized the importance of connecting the vast territories of Canada, especially in a time when the United States was progressing with their own transcontinental railway. With the promise of economic growth, increased trade opportunities, and improved military transportation, Macdonald's vision was backed by many influential individuals, including American entrepreneur William Cornelius Van Horne.

The Last Spike: The Great Railway, 1881-1885

by Pierre Berton (Kindle Edition)

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The Great Race to the West

The construction of the CPR began in 1881, and what followed was a herculean effort of engineering, perseverance, and collaboration. The daunting task involved tackling treacherous terrains such as the Rocky Mountains and vast expanses of wilderness.

The race to complete the railway became a fierce competition between two railway companies – the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Canadian Northern Railway. Both were vying for the government's support and financial assistance to complete their respective routes.

In the end, the CPR emerged as the victor, securing the government contracts and funding necessary to complete the railway. The ambitious project was not without its challenges, though. Harsh climates, the scarcity of resources, and the sheer scale of the undertaking made progress slow and difficult.

The Last Spike Ceremony

One of the most iconic moments in Canadian history occurred on November 7, 1885, at Craigellachie, British Columbia – the driving of the last spike.

Symbolizing the completion of the CPR, this event marked the unification of a nation and its future prosperity.

The last spike, made of gold, was sent from England and hammered into a specially prepared railway tie. The ceremony was attended by a diverse crowd of workers, politicians, and dignitaries. Among the notable attendees were Sir John A. Macdonald, Donald Smith (later known as Lord Strathcona), and Van Horne.

The driving of the last spike signified the end of a groundbreaking journey but marked the start of new opportunities. The railway became a pivotal piece in connecting Canadians from coast to coast, fostering national unity, and opening up remote territories for exploration and settlement.

The Impact on Canada's Development

It is impossible to overstate the impact of the Last Spike and the completion of the CPR on Canada's development. The establishment of the transcontinental railway brought forth an influx of opportunities for trade, commerce, and travel, which played a vital role in shaping the nation's socio-economic landscape.

The railway connected individuals and communities, reduced transportation costs, and opened up new markets for Canadian goods. The transportation of resources, such as timber and minerals, became more efficient, leading to increased production and economic growth in previously isolated regions.

Moreover, the railway facilitated the movement of people, allowing for migration and the development of new towns and cities. The West, in particular, experienced a boom in population and agricultural development, transforming it into one of Canada's key economic regions.

Preserving the Legacy

Today, the Last Spike symbolizes the perseverance and determination of those who worked tirelessly to connect Canada's vast territories. The completion of the CPR not only shaped the nation we know today but also paved the way for future infrastructure projects and economic growth.

In recognition of its historical significance, many sites and landmarks associated with the CPR have been designated as national historic sites. Visitors can explore exhibits, enjoy scenic rail journeys, and even participate in events commemorating this milestone achievement in Canada's history.

In

The Last Spike, also known as the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, stands as a testament to the indomitable spirit of those who endeavored to connect Canada from coast to coast. This monumental project, which culminated with the driving of the last spike in 1885, brought about social, economic, and cultural transformations that continue to shape Canada today.

From its ambitious beginnings to the challenges faced during construction, the Great Railway of 1881-1885 played a crucial role in unifying the nation, facilitating trade, and opening up opportunities for development. Its legacy lives on in the form of a prosperous and diverse Canada, forever connected by this legendary railway.

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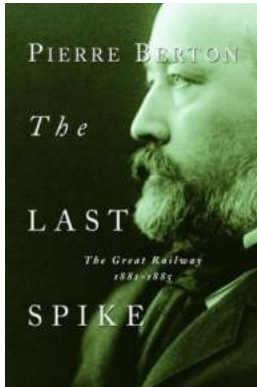
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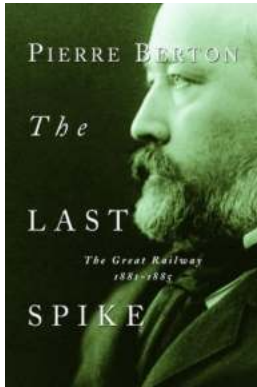


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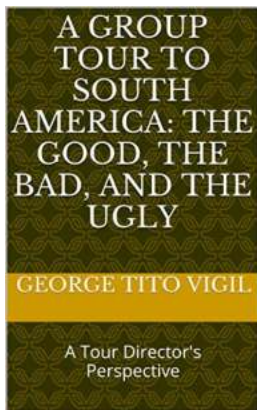
In the four years between 1881 and 1885, Canada was forged into one nation by the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway. *The Last Spike* reconstructs the incredible story of how some 2,000 miles of steel crossed the continent in just five years — exactly half the time stipulated in the contract. Pierre Berton recreates the adventures that were part of this vast undertaking: the railway on the brink of bankruptcy, with one hour between it and ruin; the extraordinary land boom of Winnipeg in 1881–1882; and the epic tale of how William Van Horne rushed 3,000 soldiers over a half-finished railway to quell the Riel Rebellion.

Dominating the whole saga are the men who made it all possible — a host of astonishing characters: Van Horne, the powerhouse behind the vision of a transcontinental railroad; Rogers, the eccentric surveyor; Onderdonk, the cool New Yorker; Stephen, the most emotional of businessmen; Father Lacombe, the black-robed voyageur; Sam Steele, of the North West Mounted Police; Gabriel Dumont, the Prince of the Prairies; more than 7,000 Chinese workers, toiling and dying in the canyons of the Fraser Valley; and many more — land sharks, construction geniuses, politicians, and entrepreneurs — all of whom played a role in the founding of the new Canada west of Ontario.



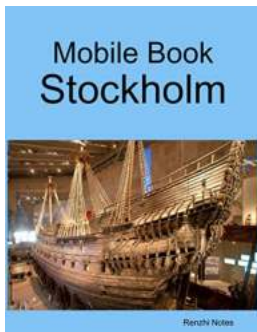
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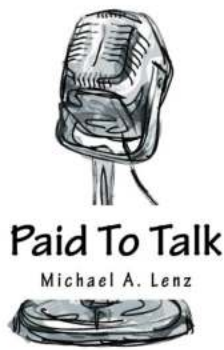
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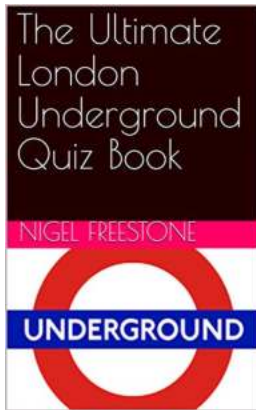
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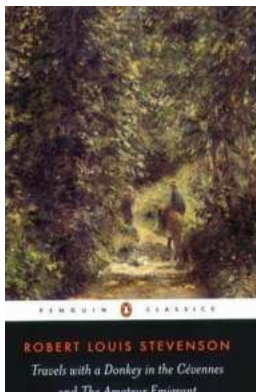
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