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THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE AASLH CORPORATE HISTORY AFFINITY GROUP

Issue 6 May 2013

About the AASLH
Corporate History
Affinity Group

Judah Ring at Union Pacific



By Patricia LaBounty, Union
Pacific Railroad Museum

A treasured artifact from the Union Pacific Historical Collection has recently come to light after being in the Washington D.C. office for

more than a decade without any real attention to its unique provenance and history. This small gold ring was given to Theodore Judah on his 29th birthday. It was created from a gold nugget found during construction of the Sacramento Valley Railroad. The ring bears a very faint inscription: "Sacramento Valley Railroad, March 4, 1855. First gold ever taken from earth in making railroad bank" along with his initial "J" on the face of the ring. While this ring is simple in style and design, Theodore Judah was not a simple man.

Theodore Dehone Judah was born in Connecticut but moved to New York as a child and there attended what would become the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Even though he had to leave his formal schooling behind at the age of 13, he had developed a passion for engineering and railroads. By the age of 20, he had distinguished himself on several challenging projects throughout the Northeast including the Niagara River Gorge Railroad. It was this record that brought him to the attention of Charles Lincoln Wilson who was seeking financial backing and an engineer for the new Sacramento Valley Railroad. Judah and his wife made the arduous journey to San Francisco in 1854 and he began work immediately laying out the new line. The Sacramento Valley Railroad, the first commercial railroad west of the Mississippi River, was only 22 miles long and predominately carried the Pony Express mail from Sacramento to Folsom, CA.

After 1855, Judah's passion for a true transcontinental railroad was rekindled and he travelled to Washington D.C. to promote his cause. After carefully observing Congress over several months, he

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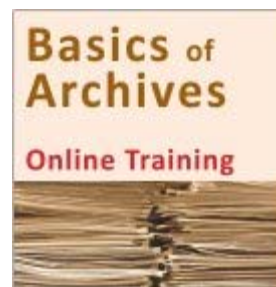
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AASLH is the ONLY national organization dedicated to the field of state and local history. It is a membership association - A home for institutions and people who work in the field of state and local history. AASLH provides leadership and support for its members who preserve and interpret state and local history in order to make the past more meaningful.

published, in January of 1857, his proposal for the endeavor entitled "A Practical Plan for Building the Pacific Railroad." Judah was opposed to any legislation being involved in the project as he was certain, after watching Congress in action, that any such involvement would be, "the signal of defeat [for the project]." Rather, his vision stipulated, "...a great simultaneous effort be made throughout the entire country....that it is a people's railroad."

Theodore Judah's vision of a people's railroad received less scorn than his prediction of trains speeding across the country in excess of 100mph, pulled by enormous locomotives. This vision, coupled with his eager willingness to talk to anyone about the venture, earned him the moniker, "Crazy Judah."

But it was Judah's vision that came to pass, as huge steamers raced across the country in excess of 120 mph a mere 70 years later. While Theodore Judah did become the Chief Engineer for the Central Pacific Railroad, building the western end of the nation's first transcontinental railroad, he did not live to see his dream become a reality. He died on November 5, 1863 in New York City of yellow fever, just a few months into the greatest engineering feat of the 19th Century and six years before his dream of a transcontinental railroad became a reality.



Corporate History in Birmingham

The Corporate History Affinity Group will be well-represented in Birmingham at the 2013 AASLH Annual Meeting. The group will host a joint luncheon with the Visitors' Voices Affinity Group to discuss the importance of benchmarking and evaluation. Our guest speaker will be Peggy Dalman, Market Research Manager at the Biltmore Company in Asheville, NC.

The group will also host a tour of the Alabama Power Archives and a session on *Diversity: Positive Programs in Corporate Archives, Museums, and Visitor Centers*.

Make plans now to join the Corporate History Affinity Group in Birmingham, AL, for the [2013 AASLH Annual Meeting](#) on September 18-21. Registration will open in mid-June.



AASLH
American Association
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