



*Nebraska History* posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

## Article Title: Joseph Barker and the 1868 Union Pacific Railroad Excursion from Omaha

Full Citation: Charles W Martin, "Joseph Barker and the 1868 Union Pacific Railroad Excursion from Omaha," *Nebraska History* 58 (1977): 122-148.

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1977Barker.pdf>

Date: 12/18/2013

Article Summary: Joseph Barker, Jr., was an early resident of Omaha who wrote a letter telling of his trip in September 1868, to the end of the tracks of the Union Pacific Railroad to witness the construction work. The trip had been set up for a large delegation of businessmen from St Louis, which had come to Omaha to promote the "Saint Louis and Chillicothe Road." Included in the article's Appendix is the "Chronology of the Original Union Pacific Railroad Track Construction from Omaha, Nebraska, to:"

### Cataloging Information:

Names: Joseph Barker Jr, Rev Joseph Barker, Frances Barker, George Barker, Mary Jane Barker, Elizabeth Steele Salt, George B Graff, G W Frost, Henry W Yates, C G Hammond, Augustus Kountze, Thomas C Durant, J W Ware,

Place Names: Omaha, Nebraska; Chicago, Illinois; St Louis, Missouri; Betley, Staffordshire, England; Elkhorn River; North Platte, Nebraska; Ohio County, Ohio; Knox County, Ohio; Benton, Wyoming Territory; Fremont, Nebraska; Columbus, Nebraska; Rock Creek, Wyoming Territory; Valley, Nebraska; Grand Island, Nebraska; Kearney, Nebraska; Julesburg, Colorado; Cheyenne, Wyoming Territory; Hermosa, Wyoming Territory; Laramie, Wyoming Territory; Allen, Wyoming; Hanna, Wyoming; Rawlins, Wyoming; Echo, Utah; Ogden, Utah; Promontory, Utah

[Please note: only some of the place names have been indexed according to more prominent mentions within the letter]

Keywords: Saint Louis and Chillicothe Road; Union Pacific Railway Company; Special Lincoln car; Pullman car;

Photographs / Images: Children of Rev Joseph Barker: George E Barker, Mary Jane Barker Hamilton, and Joseph Barker; The Rev Joseph Barker and his wife, Francis Salt Robey Barker; Supply base for tracklayers dispatched west from Omaha for over 1,000 miles in about 1868; UPI emigrant house and dining hall, and Herndon House from South 8th Street, Omaha 1871; Ware's block northwest corner of 13th and Farnam Streets, Omaha, 1868; Elkhorn Station, about ten miles west of Omaha, 1867; Fremont, Nebraska, 1867; 11th Street, Columbus, Nebraska, 1872; Union Pacific Railroad ships, North Platte, 1868; North Platte pile bridge with guard standing watch, 1868-1869; Construction train of Union Pacific Railroad, 1868; Dale Creek Bridge, Wyoming; Benton, Wyoming Territory, 1868; Private car interior with inspection party, taken near Rock Creek, Wyoming, 1869.



*Children of the Rev. Joseph Barker: George E. Barker (left), Mary Jane Barker Hamilton, and Joseph Barker.*



*The Rev. Joseph Barker and his wife, Francis Salt Robey Barker.*

**JOSEPH BARKER  
AND THE 1868 UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD  
EXCURSION FROM OMAHA**

*Edited by Charles W. Martin*

**INTRODUCTION**

Joseph Barker, Jr., the author of this letter, was an early resident of Omaha. He, his father, the Rev. Joseph Barker, mother Frances, brother George, and sister Mary Jane arrived in Omaha in 1856, two years after the city was founded. The family had left England to come to the United States in 1851 and settled in Knox County, Ohio, where the Rev. Joseph Barker bought a farm. He became dissatisfied in Ohio and in 1856 he and his youngest son George headed west. They reached Council Bluffs on April 1, 1856, and the next day crossed the Missouri River to Omaha. Here they were joined a short time later by the rest of the family.

They invested their money in lots on the original townsite and took out homestead claims. In 1860 the family returned to England to help settle the estate of Mrs. Barker's mother, Elizabeth Steele Salt of Ravenshall in the parish of Betley, Staffordshire. They remained in England for several years.

The family began receiving word from friends in Omaha that they were losing some of their property to claim jumpers, and in May of 1866, the oldest son Joseph, returned to Omaha to represent the family and to protect their property. From 1866 through 1871 Joseph wrote almost every two weeks, long letters to the family in England giving them all the information he could gather on what was happening in the area, what the prospects were for the growth of Omaha, and the prospective enhancement in the value of their property.

The following letter tells the story of his trip in September, 1868, to the end of the tracks of the Union Pacific Railroad to witness the construction work. The railroad was completed to approximately the present location of Green River, Wyoming, at that time.

The trip had been set up for a large delegation of businessmen from St. Louis, which had come to Omaha to promote what Joseph called the Saint Louis and Chillicothe Road, to run from St. Louis to Omaha. St. Louis wanted the railroad to connect with the Union Pacific so that they could benefit from the anticipated western trade and commerce, and were trying to persuade Omaha businessmen to help finance construction. The Omaha people were also anxious to have this connection because it would compete with Chicago, whose businessmen and railroads, they felt, were charging excessive prices for goods shipped from that city. The Union Pacific Railroad also welcomed the proposed St. Louis connection as they wanted all the feeder lines they could get to help make their railroad profitable.

#### LETTER OF JOSEPH BARKER

Omaha, Sep. 28 to Oct. 4th 1868

My dear good Mother:

I have duly received your two last welcome letters but have missed writing to you last week. As I told you we were all expecting our St. Louis visitors. I was on the Reception Committee and very busy I was during the two very wet days preceeding their arrival. They got here late on Saturday night the 19th, the roads dreadfully muddy. We had prepared a reception banquet at the Herndon<sup>1</sup> & our citizens, and they were to have dined together. We prepared for 150 guests & expected only about 75 St. Louisians. The weather & the receptions along the route from St. Louis, especially at St. Joes., detained them and they did not arrive until ten at night, and when they came they numbered about 125, headed by the Mayor of St. Louis & consisting of some of the leading bankers & representative businessmen of that city. We had also about a dozen additions at Omaha of New York & Chicago Generals, bankers & governors who had come out to see Omaha & go to the end of the road.

We had a bustling time & offended some of the more touchy of our own citizens who had to stand back while we got all our visitors attended to. We had all seated & then after a few friendly words of

welcome the party were allowed to make an excellent supper, with music and champaign, after which a few speeches closed the reception as it was nearly twelve & Sunday morning.

The next day was fine & they were visited & went to church. On Monday we had a public meeting in the theater, which they all attended, & met our businessmen & propertyholders. It was a Railway meeting to see what could be done to hurry on and carry through the St. Louis and Chillicothe Road. Everybody was in favour of it. Some excellent speeches were made. St. Louis offered to give 2 million if Omaha & the counties along the route would do a proportionate part, which Omaha & the representatives of the counties both very readily promised. At noon the meeting separated. Meantime the Committee had got together all the public & private carriages & were prepared to take our visitors a drive over the town & country around. They nearly all went. And at two we gave them another dinner with wine & speeches. And at four, they were all driven to the U.P. Railroad depot & handed over to the Railway authorities. Our citizens determined also to pay all their "Hotel Bills" and did so, the City Council appropriating \$500 for that purpose & a public subscription making up all the deficiencies. It was a well gotten up reception. It went off well & the St. Louisians were both surprised and delighted. The U.P. Railway Company were anxious to get St. Louis up here & gave them an invitation to go over the Road to the end & see the country & its resources. They also gave an invitation to the Committee of Eight gentlemen who went down to invite the St. Louisians to come up & visit us, at their own expence, but would not allow any others to go.

Dr. Graff<sup>2</sup> being one of the Omaha delegation, looked after my interests & got me the reversion of the ticket of Mr. Burns who could not spare the time to go to the end of the road, and by that means I got the privilege of joining the party and left with them on Monday last the 21st inst. Knowing how very particular the Railway officials are about interlopers, I felt somewhat nervous when I got to the cars & saw Mr. Frost<sup>3</sup> eyeing my badge & bundle. I spoke to Mr. Yates,<sup>4</sup> a friend of mine & one of the regular committee & he laughed at my fears, but to make me easy, said he would go & speak to Frost. He did so and after awhile Mr. Frost came up to me & slapped me on the shoulder saying, "Mr. Barker, you are all right, make yourself perfectly easy, you are very welcome," & passed on to superintend the preparations. I have



*This supply base was the Union Pacific's supporting headquarters, about 1868, for tracklayers dispatched west from Omaha for over 1,000 miles. Below: U.P. emigrant house and dining hall (middle right) from south 8th Street, Omaha, 1871; Herndon House (right rear). All photos courtesy of U.P. Railroad Museum, Omaha.*



known Frost distantly for some time. He is the Big Railway man here, & the relative of [Thomas C.] Durant, and he was going out with the party to do the honours for the Company.

Altogether we were a party of 100, only the true St. Louisians & about ten leading men from N.Y. & Chicago & the 8 Omaha Committee were allowed to go. The other outsiders had had passes given them to go to the end & back by the regular trains. But we being the honoured guests of the Company, had a splendid Special Lincoln car,<sup>5</sup> built for the President's use, and two splendid Pullmans palace cars. Two fine day cars, one of which was arranged as a bed or night sleeping car. Then we had an hotel car with a bar & seats & tables for thirty to eat at once, then a cooking car & two baggage cars in front. We had some twenty coloured stewards, cooks & bedroom men, besides the regular guards & brakemen to run the train. One of the best engines & Mr. Frost & the Superintendent of the carshops to attend and do the honours to us.

It was a most complete & costly arrangement for our comfort. Good food & no end of wine, champagne, cigars, etc. were all provided at the expence of the Company & with the exception of the fees paid to the servants & bed blacks, we had nothing to pay or spend. We had our regular cooked meals in the dining car as we traveled at the rate of 35 & 40 miles an hour. When we could, we stayed at the Eating Stations on the Road, where Mr. Frost had ordered the best of meals to be prepared for us, by telegrams sent on as we traveled along. We had a telegraphic operator on board who connected his wire & apparatus whenever we stayed for wood & water & so kept the line posted as to our whereabouts & us also. It was a most complete arrangement, most comfortable to us, and I understand the expence and the loss in work by our upsetting all the regular arrangements of the road, one way & another, cost the Company twenty thousand dollars. There was no crowding and the Mayor & Mr. Frost attended personally on all the guests.

We left Omaha at 5 P.M. Soon after we had crossed the Elkhorn, a severe storm of hail, rain & thunder passed over us. It was then dark & at 7 we all had supper. The lamps were lit & parties formed for cards. At eleven all were in bed & we traveled steadily on all night. I had a sleeping compartment to myself all the time & was very comfortable, only the closing of all windows & the heat from the stoves kept burning during the night gave me a cold before I got back & which I am yet suffering somewhat from.

At 7 next morning we were up & dressed, washed & combed, with clean blacked boots, brushed up & ready for breakfast at North Platte, a station beyond the 100th Meridian, a point on the road we stopped at for a few minutes to see.<sup>6</sup> There was nothing but the endless grassy valley & the low treeless bluffs in the distance, the chilly looking river floating by, & a post marking the meridian.

At North Platte we found a good railway hotel & were served at once with an excellent breakfast. The town is a small one, with large well built workshops & round houses, as large nearly as those at Omaha. It is a place for fitting up cars & engines that get out of order, & the headquarters of one division of the road. The Company employ about 300 men here. We saw here for the first time, soldiers. As we came up to the station we saw a guard of soliders drawn up on the platform, who presented arms as we stopped. Their tents were pitched close to the depot, about 25 in all. At every station there are these guards varying in number from 12 to 50 men according to the importance of the point. They live in tents, but were preparing their winter quarters, sod houses around rough wood frames, with cellars & loop holes to protect themselves if attacked by Indians.<sup>7</sup>

From North Platte we traveled on to Julesburg & thence up Lodge Pole Creek to Sidney Station, where we stopped at three in the afternoon for dinner. As we left North Platte the sun came out & the day was fine & pleasant. We could see the country. It is a long endless valley—flat—and about 5 to 6 miles wide. The bluffs on both sides low, monotonous & generally bare of timber. The river is tolerably broad, shallow & showing numerous sandbars but no timber, nearly a treeless prairie. The soil is lighter in colour, much sand & gravel in it, but I should say it is a good soil & capable of cultivation as far as Pole Creek, covered with much the same grass as around Omaha but generally not so thick or rich. But plenty sufficient & good for all purposes.

It is a mistake to call it a desert. If we had such soil in Ohio & Knox County,<sup>8</sup> we should have thought it very rich & good. There were many marks of alkaline encrustations like hoar frost on certain dry water places, but no such places as I had heard of. But it is a great dreary uninhabited region. Miles upon miles, hundreds of miles with no trace of man, but a wagon track to be seen. Here & there near some station you saw stacks of hay being put up & large herds of fine looking well fed cattle. But no farms,

no attempt at cultivation. It also seems scarce of streams & water. They say it needs irrigation. That is likely, but someday the great river will have these windmills which the railway company have at every station, which fill large tanks & supply them with all the water they require at no expence but the windmill placed on the side of the stream & supplying each farm with all the water it needs for irrigation. So the Lodge Pole & even a great part of that valley will some day be peopled & cultivated & irrigated. If the Indians were once driven away & the country secured from their depredations we should soon see men venture into stock raising & this would be one of the finest valleys for such purposes & pay very well.

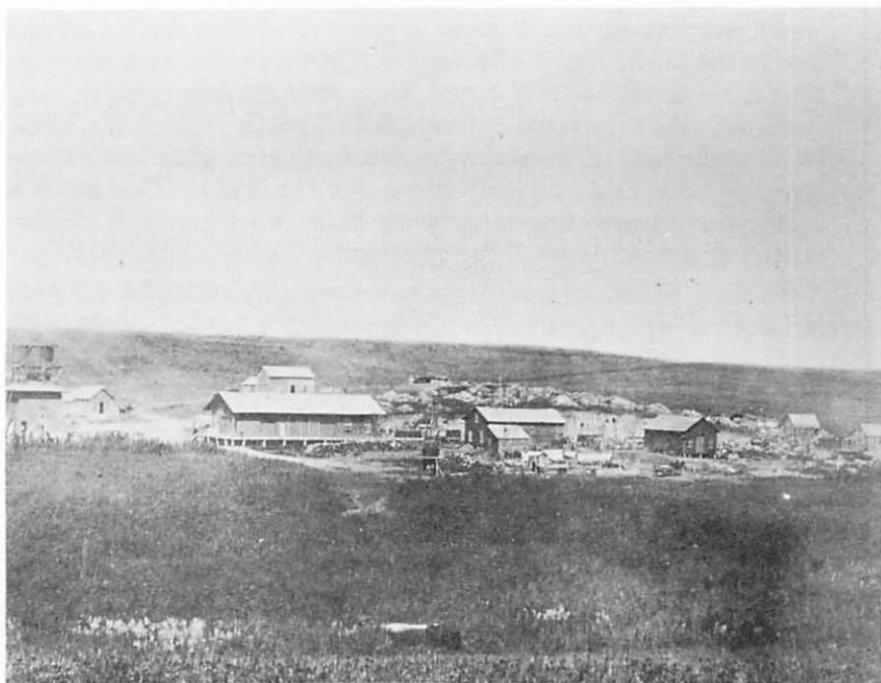
The North Platte, which we crossed, has a good low bridge. It is a broad clear shallow stream with many sandbars & low banks. The South Platte stretches out towards the southwest. The hills here curve out to the north & south & the country is a broad plain for several miles until we gradually find ourselves going up the Lodge Pole Creek from 4 to 5 miles wide. This is but a repetition of what has gone before, more dreary perhaps & monotonous & not any richer in quality. But limestone begins to crop out on the sides of the bluffs & the soil is more gravelly & whiter. At Sidney the tops of the bluffs are fine limestone of great thickness & worn by time into various fanciful forms. Here they are quarrying out the stone & using it to build culverts & bridges & replace the wood work on the road, & from this point they will carry the hewn stone to Omaha for building purposes & for the bridge. This too is a Headquarters with fine large workshops, warehouses & round-houses & a good hotel & an encampment of some 36 soldiers.

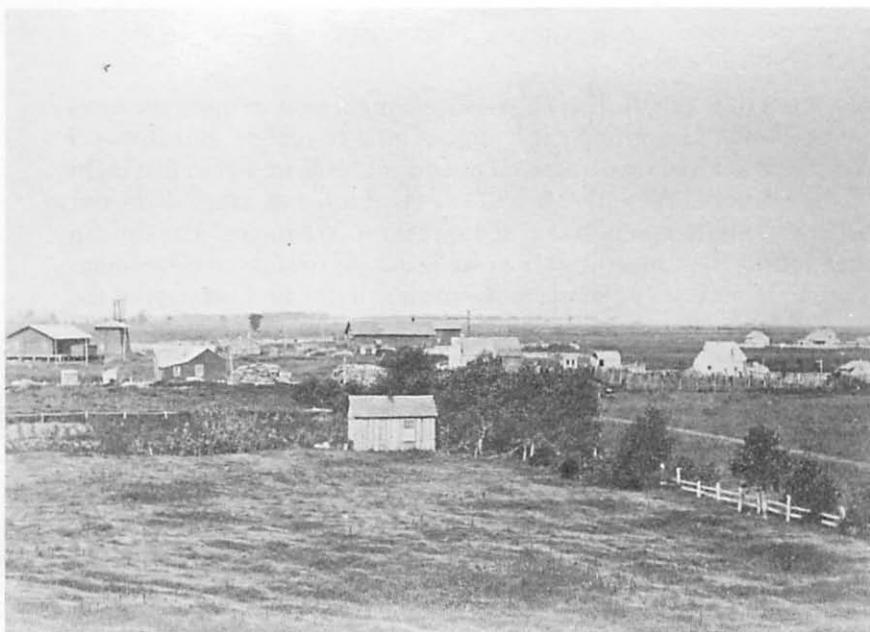
Sidney is 414 miles from Omaha. Our dinner consisted of black tail deer, & antelope meat, both beautiful & tender meats, with every other good thing. All but the game & meat brought from Omaha, as has to come everything used by the people scattered from one end of the road to the other.

After passing Sidney the country is dry & the ground hard & gravelly. The grass is thin & poorer. In spots it is finer, but generally poor. But we saw antelope galloping away from us & passed through lots of prairiedog towns. I saw the guiney pig & squirrel-looking little fellows standing up on their hind legs looking at us & diving down their holes out of our way. The hills are still rocky, full of stone & pine trees half way up the valley begin to appear blasted, stunted, though large sized pines



*Ware's block northwest corner, 13th and Farnam Streets, Omaha, 1868.  
Below: Elkhorn Station, about ten miles west of Omaha, 1867.*





*Fremont, Nebraska, 1867. Below: 11th Street, Columbus, Nebraska, 1872.*



scattered over the bluffs. Various valleys seemed to open on to us & the bluffs, as evening came on, seemed to recede, but it was 9 o'clock & dark when we arrived at Cheyenne & we again lost sight of the scenery. We only stayed a few minutes & started on our night journey to ascend the real mountains. We passed Laramie in the night & next morning when we arose we found ourselves near Carbon in what is called the mountains & in the highest part of the road. It was still a valley, wider & more broken with higher bluffs in the distance like sea side cliffs. The ground was bare & frozen. Snow was in patches about. The bluffs were covered with snow & beyond the bluffs were bluffs still higher, & beyond, snow capped & streaked with black lines which our glasses showed to be pine trees.

Here & there we passed through lakes or rather ponds of water, no grass, nothing but brown clayey gravelly soil & the bluffs the same with weather worn rocks protruding. It was a continuous broken wild dreary & irregular valley with no grass or trees but patches of sage bushes about 1 to 2 feet high, in some places covering & others scattered over the ground. In the far distance was a still higher bluffly broken range & before us was one or two large hills apparently detached, standing alone. We found on enquiry that these bluffs were the Rocky Mountains. These snow-covered bluffs beyond, the Snowy Range, & the detached big hills before us were the Elk Mountain & the Black Buttes, the great mountains and landmarks of the range. We ourselves were between 8 & 9 thousand feet above the sea & those distant bluffs which seemed so close were 50 & 60 miles away. It was a wild bleak dreary region. Very disappointing. No grandure. No scenery. Nothing we expected. A mere valley wider & more dreary & broken than we had passed. But it was the Pass through & the top of the Rocky Mountains. We wound along by & nearly all round Elk Mountain & as we saw it better, we perceived that it was a really fine hill or mountain & of large dimensions, covered with snow & seamed with dark black pine forests. We traveled round & by it for nearly 100 miles, it appearing always at the same distance though at one point we were within 20 miles of its base.

We stayed at Carbon<sup>9</sup> & saw the coal mines. There are several running into the hills & in some of the deep cuttings the road runs here through, we saw the seams of coal between the sandstone rocks. We had our breakfast here & after it, Mr. Frost had us all grouped & a photographer who had been brought for the purpose

took several pictures of the party with the road & the Elk Mountain as a back ground. We then started again & wound round the valley with high rocky bluffs through rocky valleys with a rapid descent into the Platte valley & crossed the North Platte again at Fort—I forget it's name.<sup>10</sup> We saw the large fort & the crowds of soldiers but passed on into the valley in which is Benton, 694 miles from Omaha.

This was a wide valley with high rocky bluffs, quite precipitous in appearance. The day before, snow had fallen all through the mountain region & on bluffs & peaks it still rested. In the valleys it had nearly disappeared. A small stream ran on one side the road & Benton was on a flat piece of prairie with high sloping & rounded bluffs a mile or two behind. This was the first canvas town we had seen. It has, to this time, been quite a place, the end of the working road & headquarters. It is laid out regularly but three fourths of the numerous saloons, dance houses, eating houses, stores & hotels are canvas tents. Some six thousand people have centered here during this summer. Business of all kinds has been carried on and I understand *overdone*. When we arrived, numbers had taken down their canvas or frame abodes & moved off to Green River which is expected to be the headquarters for the winter season. The remainder were packing up & the place had very much the appearance of a large English Fair the day after the close. Benton will disappear in another month or two, like Julesburg & many other points.<sup>11</sup>

Here the water begins to be bad. Brakish with alkali. The railway eating house is rent by the young Englishman who crossed with me in the CHINA last spring.<sup>12</sup> Since July he had bought at Omaha \$12,000 worth of provisions & vegetables & all he uses. He is doing well having the U.P. Road's patronage. His water which he has to get from the streams running down from the mountains some miles off, costs him \$100 a week.

We did not stay long at Benton, we went on slowly staying at Rollins Springs<sup>13</sup> where the valley some 30 miles from Benton comes to an end, the bluffs rocky, broken, shattered & steep, closing in the valley with only an opening through the rocks to pass out of into a wider, wilder & more desolate valley, the celebrated Bitter Creek, which runs down into Green River. The passage is a small canyon which the stream had worn through the high rocky barrier. The scenery is rather picturesque at Rollins Springs, & the stream is full of trout they say, the water being from the melted snow.

Here the road makes out their headquarters with roundhouse works, shops & large hotel all of fine white or brownish sandstone. Here you see to the east the Elk Mountain & the Snowy Ranges rising beyond, & the bluffs of the valley sixty miles or nearly 100 behind you, & you see the different bluffs of the winding valleys you have passed through look like steps in one great ascent; and this feature we perceived to the end of the track which we reached nearly one hundred miles west.

The waters here are still tributaries to the Platte & run to the Atlantic though we were on a rapidly declining grade. The Bitter Creek valley stretches out into a wide flat plain as level as the Platte but much wider with rocky barren cliffs cut up in queer & often detached and picturesque slopes. The bluffs stretch out north & south until lost in the distance, then others seem to rise up & in some places close you in for miles, then other valleys seem to run out N. & S. & it becomes a wild hilly confused region. All the bluffs seem to start near the level & rise up to a long slanting angle . . . when they break abruptly off & others come in. You wind about, passing detached hills & rocks, sometimes widening out into extensive basins, the long ridgy bluffs miles away & so you go for 100 miles to where the valley narrows again & runs through canyons out to the Green River. We often cross the nearly dry bed of a narrow deep stream with pools of thick brown muddy water. This is Bitter Creek & all water to drink has to be hauled 30, 40 & 50 miles by rail or wagon as the circumstances require. At many points you have really fine views. You stop & look back, and it was toward evening, the sun's yellow rays & rosy purple tints thrown over the scene, & for 150 miles in this clear rare atmosphere, I saw the bluffs rising & ascending step above step to the snowy capped range we had passed in the morning.

The broken bluffs showed in all sorts of fantastic shapes & all colours of earth & rocks, some white, yellow, deep red, black, but generally brown. Many places with scattered pines, but all black, dreary & desolate. No grass, and not always even the monotonous grey coloured sage brush & dull gray scrubby cedar brush no higher than the sage. A barren tossed up region, as if internal upheavals at different times had raised this country out of a sea, step by step & as the waters receded had worn away the soil from the rocks & cut out all sorts of queer valleys. The earth of all this country is a kind of clay & sand & one half broken up rocks & gravel. Splendid for building roads & gives a fine grade all

through. The road all through being raised up some six or eight feet above the level of the valleys.

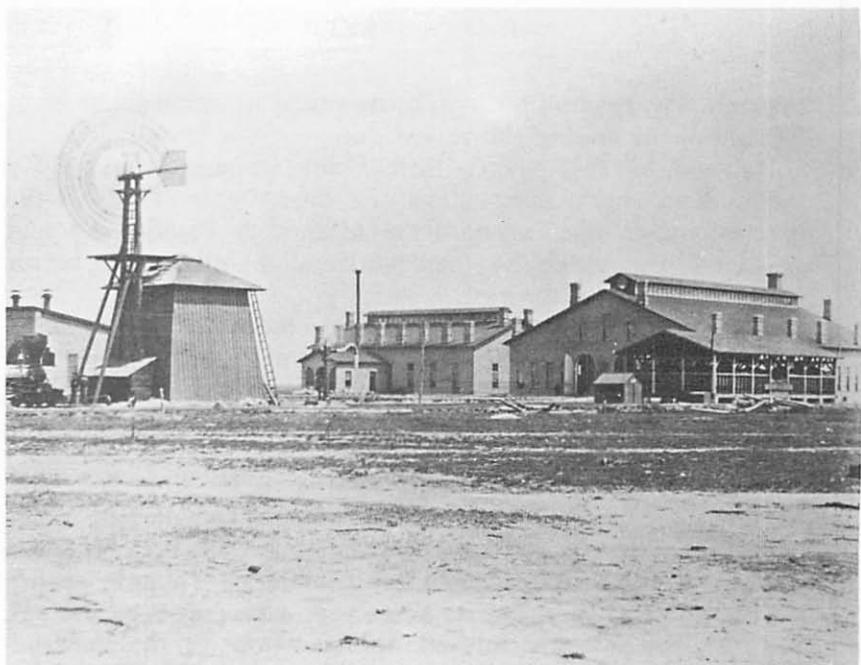
Half way over this region of Bitter Creek, we passed a post with a flag at a wayside canvas village of a dozen tents. This was the divide between the waters of the Atlantic & Pacific. We had crossed the mountains, but there was the slight hill dividing in this plain the waters of the east & west.

It was nearly dark when we got to the end of the road,<sup>14</sup> so we had to pass the night on a side track. And in the morning we were all up by sunrise & went out to see the men lay the track. There were some hundreds of men in several gangs; fine healthy bronzed & soldierly looking young men. They worked well, with military precision & it was really worth coming to see how fast, how regularly & completely they did their work. The galloping teams with loads of ties, the gangs marking out & leveling the ties, & last the rail layers & spike drivers. Or rather the last is a more leisurly party who go over every part & see that each part is securely & completely & properly finished, & then steams up the construction trains with loads of rails & ties, spikes, etc., with the cabooses cars, the homes & hotels of the working parties.

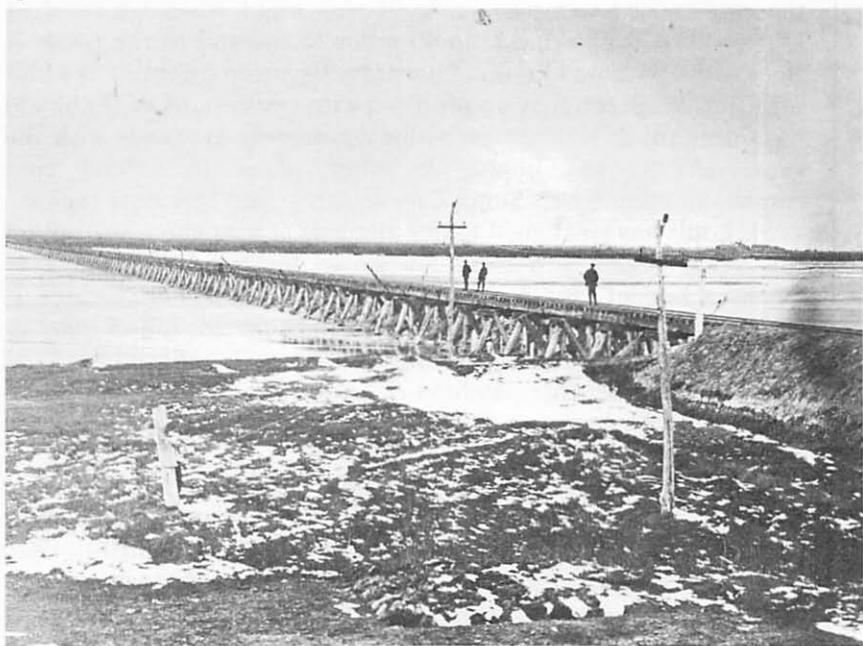
After breakfast we again had our likenesses in groups taken & we then started on our way back. It was night when we reached Benton. We had been 830 to 40 miles to the end of the track & Benton is 694 from Omaha. Our party began to be tired. We had meetings & speeches as we returned with resolutions of thanks to the Company & railroad plans for connecting St. Louis with the great U.P.R. at Omaha & other plans to extend that communication up to Sioux City & the upper Missouri region.

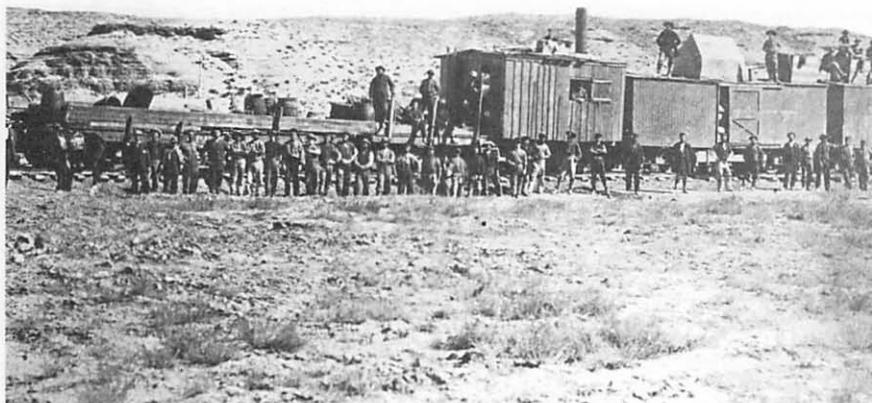
St. Louis has awakened to her interests & sees she must not let this great region slip from her grasp for the sole benefit of Chicago. Lots of wine & numbers of toasts were drunk. But it was a staid well-behaved party, though lively & social, full of jokes & fun. When tired of the monotonous scenery, we played cards at tables set between the windows & seats of the palace cars & we passed over the gangways from car to car always visiting & mixing with each other.

We passed Benton and all the region of the day before during our night ride & the morning found us on Laramie Plains & at sunrise we were at Laramie City. This is the most beautiful place of the whole region. Here the Road are building extensive works, round house, store & manufacturing houses. They are fine



*Union Pacific Railroad shops, North Platte, 1868. Below: North Platte pile bridge. A guard stood watch during the winter of 1868-1869 against possible Indian attack.*





*Construction train of the Union Pacific Railroad, 1868. Below: Dale Creek Bridge, Wyoming. The span measured 700 feet long and towered 126 feet above the stream bed.*



buildings of red & gray sandstone which is found here in abundance. Here they are close to wood, iron & coal and propose to make this one of their manufacturing points. Here they have a fine large hotel & boarding house with a handsome lofty well aired dining room. The house is in good hands. They have several pleasure parties boarding there who have come out to enjoy the scenery, hunting & fishing. Here we got a good wash in soft mountain water & an excellent breakfast of mountain sheep, antelope and black tailed deer, all delicious as it was well cooked.

The town stands on a level plain with the Laramie River in front at the distance of half a mile & the level prairie stretching off for five or six miles beyond to the south. A rolling country stretches for 35 miles to the foot of the bluffs or mountains which seem to be only ten miles off & covered with snow & only seem about twice as high as the bluffs at Council Bluffs & very much the same in appearance. To the east the mountains are higher & seem more distant & more noble. They look like real distant mountains. Toward the N.E. they are less & lost in the broken plains but rise up & spread out to the north but are really in the north & running to the west not anything more than high broken bluffs well covered by scattered pines & only about ten miles from the railway. The plain is covered with short grass, green in spite of frosts. The soil is gravelly of the red sandstone formation, just like the red gravelly soil round Betley,<sup>15</sup> with rocks breaking out in fancyful masses, red & gray sandstone and continue as you go east, standing out of the broken plain like castles and huge buildings in the distance. From the hills to the north they have dug a ditch which carries a fine stream of soft clean water through the town & supplies all the wants of the Company. All this region can be irrigated & when so cultivated, brings abundance of vegetables & potatoes, fine barley, rice & oats. The frosts are too much for wheat. It is a splendid grazing country. They say the cattle feed on the buffalo grass as long as it is uncovered by snow.

When five miles from Laramie the country began to show signs of granite & we went up a rather heavy grade until we arrived at Sherman, the highest point in the mountains, from which we rapidly descend some 50 miles to Cheyenne & the great plains & valleys of the Platte. The railroad went through cuttings of red & white sandstone for some miles after leaving Laramie & then through red course granite beds of rotten granite. The country became broken with immense masses of granite rocks protruding

& rising up out of the ground from 5 to 30 feet high. A turn gave us still finer & more extensive views of the real mountain scenery & the only sight we have of it to the south & south-east. All along the road the scenery is fine—grand. We soon arrive at Dale Creek ten miles from Laramie where a deep ravine is crossed by a trestled bridge built from the bottom of the valley up, of some 10 or 12 stories high.<sup>16</sup>

This creek is one vast mass of huge red granite rock with here & there pines growing. The whole country here & on to Sherman is broken up & studded by immense masses of granite, with the fine snow covered mountains stretching off in the distance one hundred & fifty miles to the south by actual measurement. This Laramie country is really splendid. It culminates at Sherman & then suddenly lose sight of it & all of the rocky mountains is passed & lost. I cannot describe it. I wish I could. The mountains are long broken ranges. No detached peaks. If you were not told where you were you would look upon it as an immense broken valley with high bluffs at the sides. This region of Laramie is really fine. Grand & beautiful. The rest of the mountain scenery as you pass through it disappoints you, as some one who passed through & had gone out with visions of Alpine grandure said, "They are on the whole a gigantic swindle." The fact is we only get glimpses of real mountains & they are so distant we lose part of the effect. Then it is a break in the range we travel through & we have ourselves imperceptibly ascended to a height of 8,000 feet before we arrive at the base of the Hills & mountains we are looking for. Another fact is that there are no such mountains or such scenery to be found here as the Swiss Alps.

I was however pleased with my journey & what I had seen. We continued our journey staying at Cheyenne half an hour. It is quite a little town of I should say 2,000. The railway are building workshops, hotel & roundhouse & when the Denver Road is completed, it will be a considerable town. It is situated in a wide valley, level, with low bare bluffs in the distance. A poor dry barren place. The rest of the road I have described.

The next Saturday morning found is at Columbus. Here the valley is wide & rich with timber along the riverside. Columbus is a little place, well built houses, a few stores & a good steam mill. No railway works. About 300 people to 500 I should say. The country down to Fremont & Omaha is fine, agriculturally splendid, but few farms, vast regions without a house. Near Fremont & thence to

Omaha we pass lots of good farms & houses & fine crops. Our guests were delighted with the crops & wealth of the soil. Fremont is quite a large place with good brick houses & two large hotels. A place of over one thousand with every sign of well doing & enterprise.

And now I have got home. I hope this long attempt to give you an idea of what I have seen will not weary you. It is hardly describable & I am not the one to do it. It has to be seen to realize really what it is. Of one thing I am satisfied. There is no sandy useless desert behind Omaha. It is all capable of culture or fit when the Indians are driven off for large cattle ranges. And much that is now dry sandy & barren will be developed by irrigation in to a blooming country. The mountain region is one vast magazine of wealth, coal, iron, silver, gold, copper & lead. It will be an attraction to pleasure seekers and hunters & a great manufacturing region around Laramie. But there is work for millions of workers for ages to come.

The road itself is not a swindle. It is the best road in the states, especially through the mountain region where the fine gravel makes the best of roads. There was a time when the U.P. Co. seemed only desirous of making money out of building the road. They have now changed their policy. They have found out the wealth there is in it & are building it and intend to carry it on as a permanent enterprise. It was their intention to build large manufactures of cars & wagons at Laramie & Cheyenne, but they find the lumber of that region not suitable and it is likely now that they will build them at Omaha. If they do, we shall have very large establishments here, a City of workshops.

The St. Louisians were delighted with their trip & treatment. They seem determined to push through a road from St. Louis to Omaha. They are though, divided as to whether it shall be the Chillicothe or the Pacific road up the west side of the river from Leavenworth up here. It seems they consulted Gen'l. [William T.] Sherman & he told them by all means to push on their roads & go out & see for themselves. He said the U.P., or the North Road, was the only one that would be finished through to the Pacific, as the Kansas Branch<sup>17</sup> was at a stand [still] & was not likely to get aid from Congress for some years to come. The government would make Omaha their point & use that road as much as they could, that it was St. Louis' interest to connect as soon as possible. They told us that U.P. machine shops & car works were larger & finer than any in St. Louis. I understand the U.P. Co. have offered to



*Benton, Wyoming Territory, 1868. The "Bank" in the "Wines & Liquors" tent was operated by J. W. Ware. Gallagher and Megeath (right) was a wholesale grocery firm operating out of Cheyenne and Omaha.*

iron & stock the road if they will grade & tie it from Leavenworth to the ox-bow.<sup>18</sup>

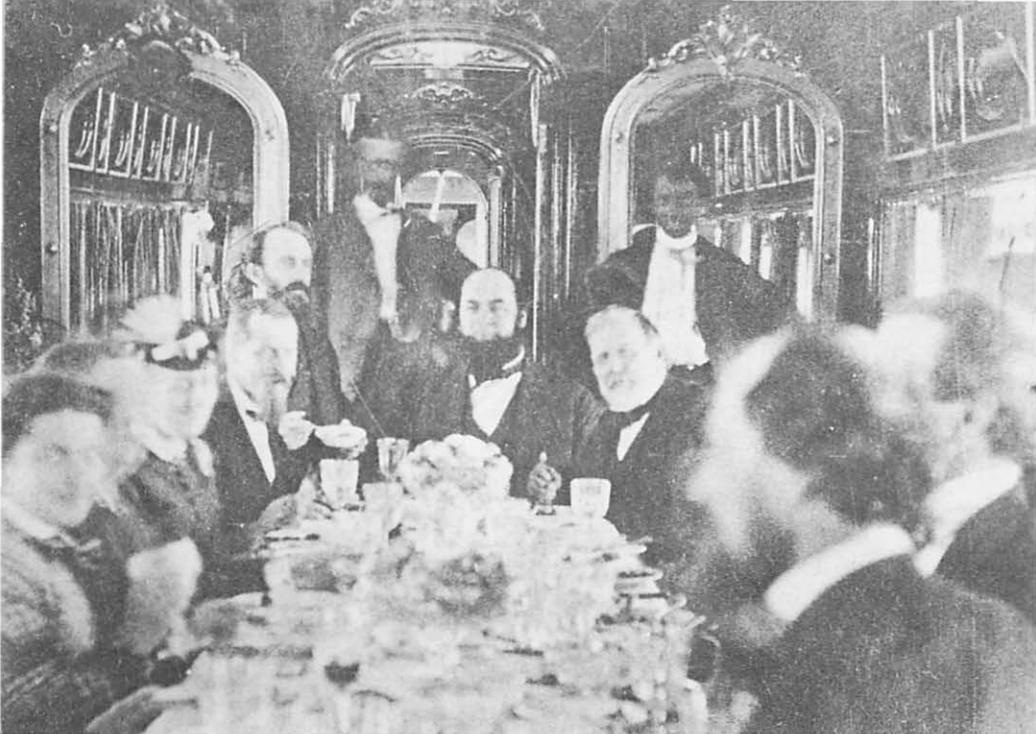
Since my return I have been quite busy about our railroad from Sioux City to Omaha.<sup>19</sup> The U.P. road are desirous Mr. Frost informs us to secure a connection with Sioux [City] on this side of the river for the purpose of getting the lumber of Minnesota whose railroads will soon be completed to Sioux City. I understand Blair's DeSoto Road is at a stand [still] in consequence of injunction.

Since I came back I have suffered considerably from cold & tick. This has partly prevented my getting this letter off before this. Another reason is the whole lower river country, Nebraska City, Council Bluffs, Brownville and St. Jos. have been attacking the St. Louis delegation on their return. They are aroused & afraid of the impression our treatment has made upon them. Their different railroad interests are too, all in arms. Nebraska City is against the Chillicothe Road & has divided the delegation, one party for it & the other set upon the immediate pushing up on this side of the river of their Pacific Road from Leavenworth. General Hammond<sup>20</sup> telegraphed up to Caldwell, Graff & me to hurry down to Brownville & Nebraska City & organize a river road from the state line & Kansas to Omaha. Graff went down & very cleverly took it out of the hands of the excited but slow-going Nebraska City people, securing half the members for Omaha. He then came up & I had to go down with the papers & get them all

signed. I found the people all excited & willing to forego all local jealousies for the present so that they might secure a railroad to Omaha & St. Louis on this side. We have got our road organized & filed & have the best men in the state as corporators. I was one. Kountze, Will R. King, J. McCormick, Caldwell, Frost the railway man, Jim Megeath & Graff.<sup>21</sup> General Hammond thinks he can manage his road & that St. Louis will push both roads through; the valley road will oblige Council Bluffs & the Iowa people to make greater efforts. It was necessary to organize it at once because our Gov. [David] Butler is in the interest of the St. Jos. people, & Blair & the Chicago people who both dread Omaha & desire to get all the half million or million of state lands appropriated for roads running from St. Jos. up the country round to Lincoln & thence up the Elkhorn & by Fremont to DeSoto & Chicago leaving Omaha in the center of the diameter of a half circle of railroads taking the traffic to St. Jos. & Chicago.

Our new road is called the St. Louis & Nebraska Trunk Road & if we can carry out our two roads to the north & south we intend to combine them. We hope by this means to secure the votes of all the river counties & towns & combine them in one road beneficial to all. If we can do it & can then get sufficient congressional influence we may get another grant of land & if so we shall be ready to go to work to grade & tie the road. The U.P. doing the rest. We have 40 of the best men in the state of both parties & all deeply interested & it looks as if we might succeed. But you can never be certain of your men here. It may all end in smoke or other combinations. However I thought I would venture in as I had a chance especially as I was in such good company. It will cost some money to put it through, but if successful, you get it back in the chance of selling out the road to more practical men in St. Louis who are wishful to take out of your hands if we succeed.

I went to Brownville by the Council Bluffs road.<sup>22</sup> We had to cross the river & drive three or four miles after leaving the road. It is a poor road & two thirds of all its business is for people on this side. The country from Brownville to Nebraska City is very rolling but one mass of enclosed farms well cultivated & with many good improvements, plantation and orchards. I saw lots of apples at both Neb. City & Brownville grown near both places. All that southern country is a fine country & well to do farmers & the counties themselves will give a good deal to secure a railroad. Co. Bluffs & St. Jos. are very angry & very jealous & we shall have Gov.



*Private car interior with inspection party from the East, taken near Rock Creek, Wyoming, 1869.*

Butler & his Lincoln & DeSoto party down on us. We hope to provide a road from here to Lincoln that will satisfy that party, & if so, we are likely to be safe. But do not count on anything, the chances are too great.

The City is very lively. A good deal of outside property is changing hands and a number of strangers are coming & going & looking & enquiring. And our people are beginning to have large expectations again. The railroad are laying out fresh buildings large ones & will push them on until the season obliges them to stop. We are confidently informed the bridge will be commenced soon.<sup>23</sup> Yesterday Bartlet told me the rail co. had put into his hands the new map of their depot grounds with orders to commence at once and see the lot owners & arrange for the sale & buying of the lots. They gave him 20 days to do it in. Short time, but they want to commence grading & building offices in 20 days.

Frost told me & others the Company had 200 feet wide up the valley by John Davis old brick yard from 14 & 15 Streets extending a mile S.W. & that they intended to fill it in & grade it up above the road & build warehouses & depots there. If so, our lots on 15th Street will be as valuable as any in town.<sup>24</sup> We seem to be all right

& Durant seems for us. If no sudden trouble does not upset us we bid fair to go on prosperously. I hope we may, though I always hope with fear & trembling. Durant is very unwell. If he should go off we might find we had active enemies. But Omaha is growing stronger every day. The military buildings all this time have been going ahead. There are 20 large buildings already completed and others are being rapidly put up. They look like another town.

Our gas works are also progressing and the town has a very busy active appearance. We have had several frosts & fall is upon us in its beauty rapidly passing into the monotonous brown of winter. The weather is fine but changeable and I, excepting my tick, am well. That is troublesome, but I hope to get over it soon. I hope you all continue to improve & to do well. I must now conclude. Do not think something is the matter if my letters are not regular. I will write as regularly as I can. My best love to you all & to Annie & my Aunts & Uncle who I hope is improving. Write often. Yours most affectionately,

Jos. Barker Jr.

If I can get one or two of the photographs, I will send them to you.

## APPENDIX

### CHRONOLOGY OF THE ORIGINAL UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD TRACK CONSTRUCTION FROM OMAHA, NEBRASKA, TO:

<u>Date Construction Completed or Put Into Operation</u>	<u>TO</u>	<u>Mile Post From Omaha (0.0)</u>
December, 1862	Council Bluffs, Iowa	22.8 mi.
December 2, 1863	Ground broken in Omaha	
July 10, 1865:	The first spike of the Union Pacific Railroad was driven at "Initial Point" in Omaha. The "initial point" was inundated when the Missouri River changed its course in the 1870's and is now in the center of Carter Lake, opposite Pratt Street in Omaha.	
September 22, 1865		10
<u>January 24, 1866</u>	<u>Valley, Nebraska</u> <sup>25</sup>	34.2
	Fremont, Nebraska	46.2
April, 1866	North Bend, Nebraska	61.2
May 3, 1866	Schuyler, Nebraska (then Shell Creek)	75.5

<u>June 1, 1866</u>	<u>Columbus, Nebraska</u>	91.3
	Silver Creek, Nebraska	109.1
<u>July 12, 1866</u>	<u>Central City, Nebraska</u>	131.7
	(then Lone Tree)	
<u>August 6, 1866</u>	<u>Grand Island, Nebraska</u>	153.6
<u>August, 1866</u>	Wood River, Nebraska	169.1
<u>August, 1866</u>	Gibbon, Nebraska	182.7
<u>August, 1866</u>	Kearney, Nebraska	195.8
	Elm Creek, Nebraska	211.3
September 25, 1866	Lexington, Nebraska	231.0
	(known as Plum Creek until February 6, 1889)	
October 5, 1866	100th Meridian	247.0
1866	Gothenburg, Nebraska	255.3
1866	Maxwell, Nebraska	277.4
<u>January 2, 1867</u>	<u>North Platte, Nebraska</u>	290.9
<u>January, 1867</u>	O'Fallons, Nebraska	
<u>April, 1867</u>	Paxton, Nebraska	322.2
<u>June 9, 1867</u>	Ogallala, Nebraska	341.5
<u>June 29, 1867</u>	Big Springs, Nebraska	360.6
<u>July 5, 1867</u>	Julesburg, Colorado	371.9
	Chappell, Nebraska	386.9
<u>July, 1867</u>	Lodge Pole, Nebraska	396.4
<u>August 10, 1867</u>	Sidney, Nebraska	414.2
	Potter, Nebraska	433.0
September 23, 1867	Kimball, Nebraska	451.1
	(then Antelope)	
<u>December 11, 1867</u>	<u>Nebraska-Wyoming State Line</u>	472.0
	Pine Bluff, Wyoming	473.1
	Egbert, Wyoming	484.2
	Archer, Wyoming	507.9
<u>January 25, 1868</u>	<u>Cheyenne, Wyoming</u>	516.3
	Borie, Wyoming	526.3
	Granite, Wyoming	535.5
	Buford, Wyoming	542.1
	Sherman, Wyoming	548.9
<u>May 15, 1868</u>	<u>Hermosa, Wyoming</u>	
<u>May 16, 1868</u>	<u>Laramie, Wyoming</u>	572.8
<u>June 1, 1868</u>		633.0
July 1, 1868	Benton, Wyoming	693.0
	Howell, Wyoming	
	Bosler, Wyoming	
	Cooper Lake, Wyoming	
	Lookout, Wyoming	
	Harper, Wyoming	
	Rock River, Wyoming	
	Wilcox, Wyoming	
	Medicine Bow, Wyoming	
<u>July 21, 1868</u>	<u>Allen, Wyoming</u>	
<u>July 21, 1868</u>	<u>Hanna, Wyoming</u>	
	Dana, Wyoming	675.1
	Tunnel No. 1	
	Walcott, Wyoming	688.1
	Fort Steele, Wyoming	694.0

	Grenville, Wyoming	702.2
	Sinclair, Wyoming	
<u>August 8, 1868</u>	<u>Rawlins, Wyoming</u>	709.3
	Ferris, Wyoming	
	Hadsell, Wyoming	
	Riner, Wyoming	724.4
	Creston, Wyoming	736.8
	Wamsutter, Wyoming	751.8
	Tipton, Wyoming	767.5
	Table Rock, Wyoming	774.4
	Bitter Creek, Wyoming	784.5
	Hallville, Wyoming	798.9
	Point of Rocks, Wyoming	804.9
	Thayer, Wyoming	810.4
	Boxter, Wyoming	823.4
	Rock Springs, Wyoming	829.9
October 1, 1868	Green River, Wyoming	844.9
	Bryan, Wyoming	858.5
December 5, 1868	Granger, Wyoming	875.5
	Church Buttes, Wyoming	886.9
	Hampton, Wyoming	893.9
	Antelope, Wyoming	915.0
	Leroy, Wyoming	918.3
	Aspen, Wyoming	937.6
	Millis, Wyoming	946.3
December 23, 1868	Evanston, Wyoming	955.2
	(formerly Bear Town or Bear River City)	
December 23, 1868	Wyoming-Utah State Line	961.8
	Wasatch, Utah	966.3
	Tunnel No. 2	
	Castle Rock, Utah	974.6
	Emory, Utah	981.4
<u>January 28, 1869</u>	<u>Echo, Utah</u>	991.2
	Tunnel No. 3	
	Tunnel No. 4	
	Devil's Slide, Utah	
January 22, 1869	Morgan, Utah (then Weber)	1006.7
	Gateway, Utah	
	Riverdale, Utah	
February 9, 1869	Ogden, Utah	1031.1
February 9, 1869	(5 miles west of Ogden) <sup>26</sup>	1036.1
	Hot Springs, Utah	
	Brigham, Utah	
March 28, 1869	Corinne, Utah	1059.0
	Quarry, Utah	
	Blue Creek, Utah	
May 1, 1869		1080.0
<u>May 10, 1869</u>	<u>Promontory, Utah<sup>27</sup></u>	1086.0

Note: Milepost figures shown reflect original line distances and do not correspond with current mileposts due to line changes.

## NOTES

(I wish to thank Barry D. Combs, director of public relations for the Union Pacific Railroad, who was especially helpful in the preparation of this article and who furnished the chronology of the construction of the line which is published here as an Appendix.—Charles W. Martin)

1. The Herndon House, a leading Omaha hotel.
2. Dr. George B. Graff, Omaha Indian agent, 1860-1861, and former land agent; and a good friend of Joseph Barker.
3. Probably G. W. Frost, a Union Pacific purchasing agent.
4. Henry W. Yates, cashier of the United States National Bank of Omaha.
5. The Lincoln car, a private railroad car designed for the exclusive use of President Abraham Lincoln, was completed in February, 1865, a short time before his assassination. It was first used to convey Lincoln's body from Washington to Springfield, Illinois, for burial. In 1866 it was sold at auction to the Union Pacific Railroad and used for a time as a private car by that road's directors.
6. The Union Pacific tracks cross the 100th meridian at Cozad, Nebraska.
7. Nearly continuous hostilities swept the Great Plains for more than a decade after the Civil War as the flow of travelers, the advance of the railroads, and the spread of settlement diminished traditional ranges of the Plains tribes. In 1868 as a result of the Treaty of Fort Laramie, the Government reluctantly yielded to the Sioux and withdrew from the Bozeman Trail through Wyoming. Immediately after, during July and August, 1868, the Indians burned the three abandoned military posts that had protected this trail. In September, 1868, at Beecher's Island, 15 miles south of Wray, Colorado, Major George A. Forsyth with a detachment of soldiers, had a fight with about 1,000 Cheyenne and Sioux led by Roman Nose, Pawnee Killer, and other chiefs. Immediately after this battle, Major General Philip Sheridan began his 1868-1869 campaign against the Indians.
8. Knox County, Ohio, was the location of the farm that the Barkers left when they moved to Omaha.
9. In 1900 when the Union Pacific Railroad straightened its track and left Carbon four miles south of the new track, the town gradually dried up and disappeared.
10. Fort Fred Steele was established June 15, 1868, to protect the workers building the Union Pacific Railroad through Indian country. Located 15 miles east of Rawlins, Wyoming, at the crossing of the North Platte River, the fort was abandoned November 11, 1886.
11. Benton, named for Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, had been planned as a terminal division and was located about two miles west of Fort Fred Steele. In October, 1868, division headquarters were moved from Benton to Rawlins and the town disappeared shortly thereafter.
12. In 1867 Joseph Barker had returned to England to visit his family but returned in March, 1868, to Omaha. He crossed the Atlantic Ocean on the steamship *China*.
13. Rawlins was named for General John A. Rawlins. In 1867 General Grenville M. Dodge and a party including Rawlins were on a railroad exploration trip heading west of the North Platte River towards Bitter Creek. The country was arid, with no running water. Before reaching camp they discovered a spring in a draw near the modern site of the city of Rawlins, Wyoming. Rawlins was so relieved in getting to water that he said that if anything was ever named for him he wanted it to be a spring of water. General Dodge then named the site Rawlins Springs. When the railroad reached this area, the end of one of the divisions happened to be close to this spring, and the station there was named Rawlins. Joseph in his letter, incorrectly spells the name as "Rollins."
14. The end of the track at this time was very close to present Green River, Wyoming.
15. Betley was the Barker home in England.

16. This viaduct was built with pre-cut Michigan timber. The span measured 700 feet long and towered 126 feet above the stream bed and had to be guyed with ropes and wires against Wyoming winds and the shock of trains crossing.

17. In 1864 this railroad was named "Union Pacific Eastern Division," although it was not then owned by the Union Pacific Railroad Company. The confusion ended in 1869 when its name was changed to Kansas Pacific. It finally reached Denver in 1870 and eventually became a part of the Union Pacific system in 1880.

18. The original track of the Union Pacific headed almost south out of Omaha to near Bellevue, where it headed west through Papillion, then northward through Millard and on to Elkhorn, and finally west to the Platte River valley. This section of the track was known as the Ox-bow. It was felt that any railroad coming up from the south on the Nebraska side of the Missouri River and connecting to the Union Pacific road would naturally join on this Ox-bow. The Lane Cut-off, opened May 16, 1908, made this section of track obsolete.

19. The Sioux City to Omaha railroad was being promoted at this time to run on the Nebraska side of the Missouri River. In August, 1868, Joseph Barker wrote a letter to his family in England telling of a trip he and Dr. Graff made to Sioux City to lay out a possible route for this road. On this trip they surveyed a line from "Covington, a place in old times laid out as a town immediately on the river bank & opposite Sioux City" to "Dakota [City] & thence across the bottoms to Omaha Creek, a distance of 18 miles."

20. Probably C. G. Hammond, an experienced railroad operator, and a commissioner under the Act of 1862 to organize the Union Pacific. He was appointed general superintendent of the Union Pacific in 1869. Charges Edgar Ames, *Pioneering the Union Pacific* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), 346, 357.

21. Augustus Kountze, president of the First National Bank of Omaha, was one of the incorporators and directors of the Union Pacific. Will R. King was an early Omaha grocer. John McCormick was a leading wholesale merchant in Omaha. Smith S. Caldwell was a member of the banking firm of Barrows, Millard & Company, which later became the United States National Bank of Omaha. James Megeath was a wholesale and retail merchant in Omaha.

22. The Council Bluffs and St. Joseph Railroad, completed in 1867, and which later became a part of the Burlington Railroad.

23. The Union Pacific Railroad bridge across the Missouri River between Council Bluffs and Omaha. Its construction was announced in September, 1868, and started shortly thereafter. After many delays, it was finally completed on March 14, 1872.

24. The Barkers owned two lots on 15th Street; the southwest corner of 15th and Farnam Street, and the northwest corner of 15th and Jones Street.

25. All underscored names of towns are listed in the record of "Construction Dates into Junction Towns" compiled March 25, 1916, by the chief engineer's office of the Union Pacific Railroad. Most of the milepost readings were taken from chief engineer's November 17, 1899, condensed profile of the main line. All other data was gathered from various historical records, books, newspapers, and other material.

26. On April 10, 1869, Congress authorized the Union Pacific Railroad to lay track westward from Ogden. The Central Pacific leased for a 999-year period the line constructed by Union Pacific from Ogden to a point five miles to the west, and purchased the balance of the line Union Pacific had built beyond that point to Promontory, Utah.

27. The Union Pacific had actually built to Promontory by May 8, and celebration festivities were scheduled for that date; but the train from the east with the official delegation was late, so the driving of the Golden Spike symbolizing completion of the first transcontinental railroad took place May 10, 1869.