

The Canadian Pacific Railway

"I'm sure you have all heard of the Canadian Pacific Railway, a symbol of Canadian Identity. I'm also sure that you have all heard of the famous Last Spike Ceremony, but did you know that there are four spikes that could be the last spike? Now, this begs the question, which is the real last spike? Well, to come up with the answer we need to understand a little of the history behind the Canadian Pacific Railway.", said a silver spike

"Oh, can I explain? Pleeese", asked another spike

"No, I am doing it!"

"Argentium LastSpike! You will not yell at your brother and let him explain." said a spike who was bent.

"Fine"

"Yay!", exclaimed the spike who had wanted to explain earlier, "I think we should start by introducing ourselves. My name is Enigma LastSpike, but everyone calls me Enig. My sister was the one who was speaking, in the beginning, Argentium LastSpike. Pins LastSpike is the one who yelled at Argentium. Finally, we have the youngest in the family, Vérité LastSpike. Since we are not quite sure when some of us were made, we based our ages on the order in which we were introduced into the history of the CPR."

"Anyway", said Argentium, "The Canadia-"

"Hey! You have already gotten a chance to speak. I want a turn", interrupted Vérité. Seeing Pins giving her The Glare, Argentium agreed.

"Alright, you can explain, just make sure you talk about the scandal, okay?"

"Why do we need to go that far back? I was going to start with the ending of the railroad's construction"

"I guess you could, but I wanted to show that the planning and building process was not exactly fair"

"Oh, okay. The Canadian Pacific Railway played an important part in Confederation. In fact, PEI and British Columbia may have never been a part of Canada if it were not for this railway. The CPR is still a valuable asset to the Canadian economy. So, who was commissioned to build this railway? Building a railway across Canada is not a small task, the company chosen would be paid a lot and gain a lot of prestige. After the federal election in 1872 where Sir John A Macdonald won, Hugh Allan's company (Canadian Pacific Company) was chosen to build the railway. However, in April of 1873, a rival politician declared he had evidence of Macdonald taking a bribe from Allan. What had happened was, in the 1872 election, Macdonald needed money and Sir Hugh Allan donated \$350,000 to Macdonald's Campaign"

"Can I explain the rest?", asked Pins

"Sure", replied Vérité

"Now, this is against the Canadian constitution and is quite a big deal as this was the first political scandal ever. Its official name is the Pacific Scandal. Due to his fall in popularity, Macdonald resigned (a rare occurrence) and Alexander Mackenzie was the next in office. However, as the next election came around, people had had enough with Mackenzie. They wanted to know what the government was going to do for them. This is where clever Macdonald got back into the picture. He offered a National Policy that appealed to the electorate. What could have been better? Sir. John A. Macdonald was back in office. Now it was time to decide which company would build the railway. This time the Canadian Pacific Railway Company was chosen. The contract given to this private company was very generous. Not only would they receive \$25 million but they would also get an extensive amount of land near the railway which they could sell."

"Pins?"

"Yes Argentium"

“Can I please please explain some of this?”

“Sure, thanks for asking nicely”

“Hooray! Okay, so the construction on the Canadian Pacific Railway began in 1881 and instantly some problems emerged. The railway’s path went through Native land and there were not enough workers to build the Canadian Pacific Railway. To ‘solve’ the first problem around 1500 Indigenous people were driven off their homes in the Cypress Hills of Saskatchewan (where the railway would be built). However, it does not end there. To solve the problem of the shortage of workers the government got people from China to come help build the railway. This was a good idea as the Chinese had the skills to build this railroad properly. However, they were paid \$1 while white workers were paid anywhere from \$1.50 to \$2.50.”

“You know it is said that one Chinese immigrant died for every mile of rail track that was laid”, said Pins, “think about that for a moment. The CPR track is 12,500 miles long. Not only that, but they were also given the hardest jobs and were even made to sleep in a different camp than the white workers. Nonetheless, the work continued, and the railway was finished in 1885.

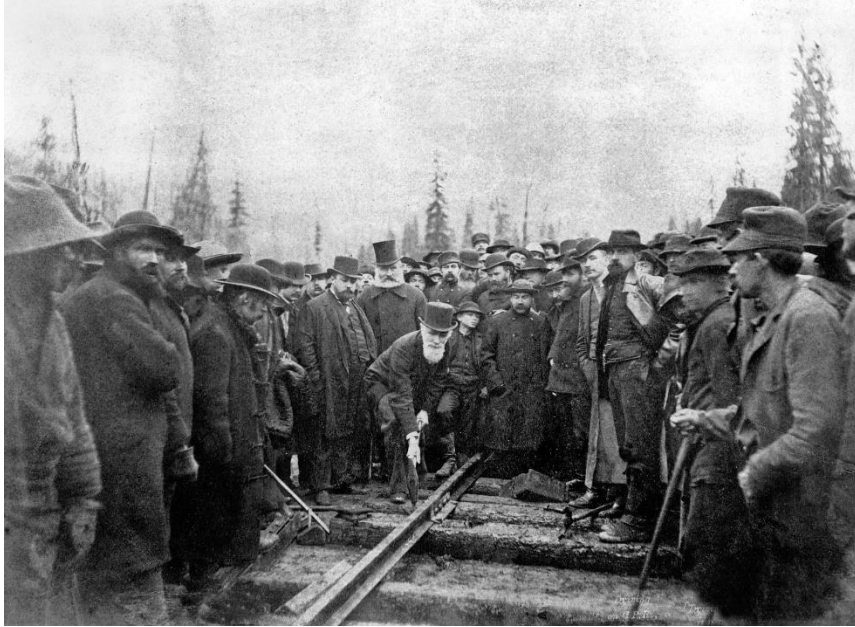


<https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-last-spike>

“This is where we come in!”, exclaimed Enig

“That is right, I am the first spike to come into play...kinda. You see I was supposed to be at the Last Spike Ceremony. I was specially crafted out of silver at the request of Governor-General Lord Lansdowne, who was to attend the ceremony. Unfortunately, he was called away to Ottawa on very important business and could not attend the ceremony. I am considered to be the most iconic and symbolic spike when it comes to the Canadian Pacific Railway.

“I am next”, said Pins, “ When Argentium failed to come to the ceremony, I was given to Donald Smith, someone who invested a lot of money in the railway. He then hammered me, a spike into the ground. The only thing I can remember was this dull throbbing pain on the top of my head followed by a sharp pain. It was so hard that I bent over in pain.”



(courtesy Alexander Ross/Library and Archives Canada/C-003693)

“I wish he had been kinder or gentler. But I am still very important. I was given to Donald Smith as a memento. He later had some pieces of me fashioned into diamond-encrusted pins for the ladies at the ceremony at Craigellachie.”

“ I am next!”, exclaimed an excited Enig, “After Pins was bent, I was brought to Smith to hammer in and this time his aim was true, I was considered so important that after the ceremony, I was taken out of the ground for fear of souvenir hunters. I was later placed at the desk of the CPR president, in Montréal. Mysteriously, I disappeared from his office (I cannot say who took me and why. It is a mystery that still needs to be solved.) However, it is said I eventually ended up locked away in a safety deposit box in a Winnipeg bank in the form of a silver-plated handle of a carving knife. I am precious, for sure.”

“Finally, it is my turn”, said Vérité, “After the ceremony, the workers had their picture taken, with me being driven into the ground where I lay to this day”

“So”, said Argentium, “Who is the last spike?”