

News Release



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Railroad Museum to Debut Powerful New Exhibit Titled “Double Exposure” Opening September 14

Exhibit Explores the Technology of Photography and its Important Role
During Construction of the First Transcontinental Railroad

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – California State Parks and the California State Railroad Museum are proud to debut a powerful new exhibit titled “Double Exposure: Photography and the Transcontinental Railroad” on September 14, 2013. The exhibition examines the emergence of photography and the ways in which the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads used the new medium during the construction of America’s First Transcontinental Railroad. Ultimately, the technology of photography not only helped to tell the story of the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, but also helped to shape public perception and foster acceptance for this massive endeavor that encouraged westward travel and settlement.

While today’s advanced technologies make taking photographs and sharing images convenient, 19th century photography was a complex, lengthy and limited process. With stereo views and three-dimensional viewing devices, seeing and sharing three-dimensional works was a wildly popular pastime after the Civil War. Works by photographers Andrew J. Russell, Alfred A. Hart and others will be on display and guests will be able to view many of these using stereoscopes and stereopticons. These gifted cameramen captured images of the construction of the railroad as well as the alien landscapes and geological formations of the West, despite the fragile nature of photographic processing and the challenging terrain. The sheer volume of their work, and the degree of difficulty it took to obtain a single photograph at the time, speak to the importance of the endeavor.

The new exhibit will showcase a timeline of the development of photography from 1839 through today, along with a wide range of photography elements, including original daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, salted-paper prints, stereographs, albumen prints and tintypes, high quality photographic reproductions, illustrations in popular newspapers and booklets, cameras and equipment, historic graphics, and maps. The science and optics behind early photography are covered and visitors will learn to tell the various types of photographs apart. It will also show how the leaders of both railroad companies used the photos for specific purposes – raising capital in Central Pacific’s case and (for both) showing proof of their progress, making the

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landscape seem tame, and later, encouraging people to settle along the route. In addition, the exhibit will illuminate how artists' woodcuts (line art renditions of photos) in the popular press changed the supposed reality of the photos, and sometimes conflicted with the railroads' desired messages.

Museum visitors will also have the opportunity to explore additional content and take pictures in a special photo booth set-up as part of the exhibit. Another interactive component, a detective card game will help families explore the exhibit together -- allowing children to lead the way to discover more about the materials, people, technology and history behind photography's role in documenting this great 19th century feat.

The "Double Exposure" exhibit will be located in the Mezzanine Gallery of the Railroad Museum and will remain on display through October 5, 2014. For more information about the California State Railroad Museum, please visit www.californiastaterailroadmuseum.org or call 916-445-6645.

About the California State Railroad Museum

Operated by California State Parks with financial assistance from the non-profit California State Railroad Museum Foundation, the California State Railroad Museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Widely regarded as North America's finest and most popular railroad museum, the complex of facilities includes the 100,000-square foot Railroad History Museum plus the reconstructed Central Pacific Railroad Passenger Station and Freight Depot, 1849 Eagle Theatre, and Big Four and Dingley Spice Mill commercial buildings in Old Sacramento. For 24-hour information, visit www.californiastaterailroadmuseum.org or call (916) 445-6645.