

TRAVELING EXHIBITS: Hell on Wheels: Union Pacific Railroad Towns in Wyoming

The construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, linking the eastern and western United States, was an engineering marvel. Covering nearly two-thirds of the country, its completion resulted in quicker and cheaper transportation and accelerated the westward expansion of the United States.

In Wyoming, and elsewhere along the construction line, end of track towns developed. Surveying and grading teams, and later track-laying teams, established temporary supply and construction camps along the rail route. Tent cities, consisting of canvas and wood structures sprang up around the work camps to supply services for the workers. Saloons, dance halls, brothels, mercantiles, and gambling houses were common. End of track towns were known for vigilantism, riots, and crime, earning the towns the name “Hell on Wheels.”

Size: 24 framed items (2 crates).

Union Pacific Railroad Contractor, Jack Casement, and his work train, circa 1868-1869. Photo by Andrew J. Russell, American Heritage Center Collections.



The American Heritage Center (AHC) is the University of Wyoming's repository of manuscripts collections, rare books, and the university archives. Many universities have primary source repositories. Few have repositories as extensive and significant as the AHC. More importantly, few universities have such repositories as welcoming and accessible to undergraduate and graduate students. Internationally known for its historical collections the AHC first and foremost serves the students and citizens of Wyoming. The AHC sponsors a wide range of scholarly and popular programs including lectures, symposia, and exhibits. Not a dusty attic or an exclusive sanctuary, the AHC is a welcoming, lively, place where both experts and novices engage with the original sources of history. Access is free and open to all.

American Heritage Center

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