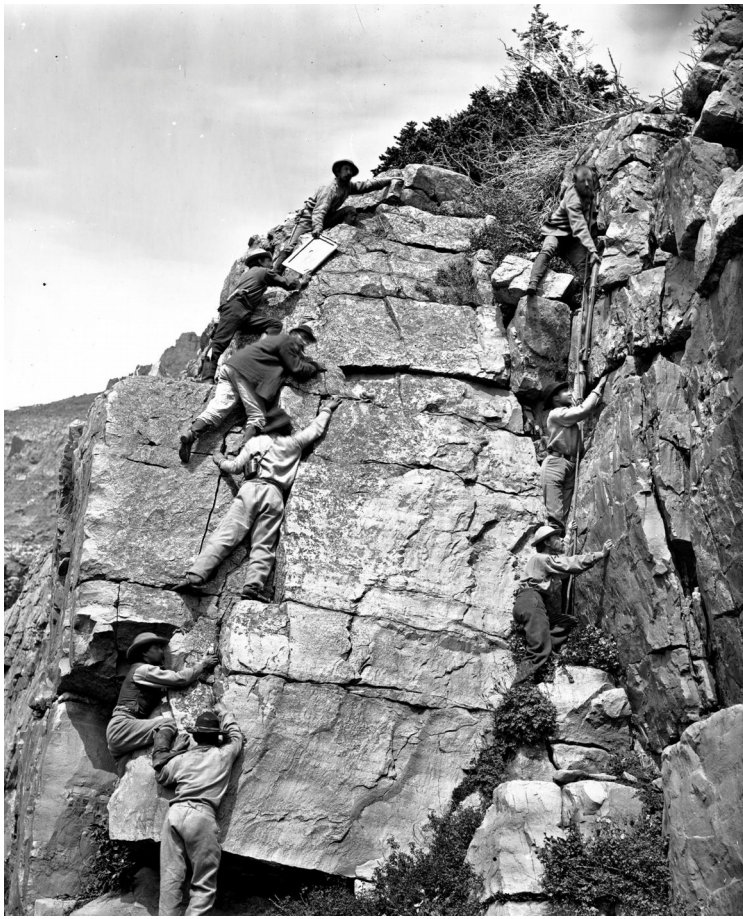


Historical Threads

Iron County Pioneer Helps Survey the Transcontinental Railroad

by Jay M. Jones



A transcontinental railroad survey party poses for an 1868 photo showing difficulties encountered in the northern Utah mountains. From the A. J. Russell Photo Collection at the Oakland Museum of California.

One of the early pioneers to Iron County went on to contribute to important events from Montana to Mexico, including surveying part of the first transcontinental railroad of 1869.

James Henry Martineau arrived in Parowan in April 1851 as a single young man 23 years of age, three months after the first pioneer company came to Southern Utah. During his first year, he was elected as Parowan City Recorder and clerk of the county court. He taught school for the month before Christmas, and was married to Susan Johnson in January of 1852 at Johnsons Fort (now Enoch).

In following years in Parowan, Martineau learned surveying under the direction of William Dame, became a notary public, helped form a dramatic company, and led the choir. He had Barney Carter make him a Base viol, which he believed was the first one made in Utah.

In 1860 he moved to Logan and was kept busy surveying many settlements and towns in Cache Valley. He was one of the founders of the Logan Dramatic Association.

Railroad Surveyor

Martineau describes part of his experience surveying for Union Pacific during the summer of 1868:

“While assisting in the Union Pacific railroad survey down the Weber Canyon we had a very hard time. The river had overflowed the bottoms on each side from one to five feet deep, and to make it worse our survey line ran through a dense growth of tall willows which shut out every breath of air, making it sweltering hot.”

On one occasion, the survey path led along a narrow ledge of a cliff. One of the chainmen named Larkins panicked, and Martineau told him to hold still and not look down. Martineau then climbed above Larkins, reaching down with a pole with one hand while holding onto a small bush with the other. Martineau writes:

“It was a fearful moment. Once I felt the bush loosen a little, as I thought, and my heart flew into my throat with the awful feeling that I was about to be dragged over the cliff to the rocks beneath — eighty or ninety feet! But the bush held, and in a moment Larkins was up and crawling rapidly to the level top on hands and knees.”

Not knowing where the Union Pacific rail line (coming from the east) would meet the Central Pacific lines from the west, the Union Pacific survey crew continued surveying west of the Promontory range. Martineau mentions that the party suffered much from thirst and from eye inflammation due to sun glare on the salty desert.

After the completion of the transcontinental railroad, Martineau helped with the Central Utah Railroad. Later, the Utah and Northern Railroad was created to build a line from Ogden to the mines around Butte, Montana. Martineau was involved in surveying, mapping and engineering for this railroad.

In 1883 Martineau moved to St. David, Arizona, where he continued his work as a surveyor. He was also involved with explorations into Mexico, and in 1890 moved to Colonia Juarez in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico.

“A World Transformed” Exhibit

The Southern Utah Museum of Art (SUMA) is currently hosting a traveling exhibit commemorating the completion of the transcontinental railroad 150 years ago. [One of the panels in the exhibit tells about James Henry Martineau](#), surveyor for the Union Pacific Railroad.