

These were just some of the descriptions given of the hell-on-wheels towns. No women are mentioned by name, but obviously they were present. In these towns that sprang up along the UP route, there was a “so-called Big Tent” that measured 100 ft long by 40 ft wide. One side was lined with a bar full of liquors and cigars. Music was furnished by a band and gambling surrounded the dance floor (Figure 9.23):

Fair women in light and airy garments, mingled with the throng. Men paid 50 cents for a drink for their girl, 50 cents for themselves, with a dance thrown in. The Whisky for the men was watered, and it was tea for the girls, but no matter, down it went (Ambrose 2000:219).

The Union Pacific attempted to control the activities in these towns, with little effect. Sometimes it would send a priest to the towns to preach repentance; at one point General Dodge stepped in and enforced civil conduct (Ambrose 2000:219). The Central Pacific, on the other hand, had different issues. Hell-on-wheels camps were not present at the end of the line for the Central Pacific. Chinese camps had their vices but were generally quiet. No prostitutes were brought in or were known to ply their “wares” in these towns. Chinese performed many of the domestic services such as laundering and cooking that women provided for the Union Pacific workers. Therefore, it would be less likely to find the presence of prostitutes and dance hall women at these camps. Homstad, et al. in their *Cultural Landscape Report* for Golden Spike National Historic Site, noted that “the characteristics of these [UP] towns contrasted sharply with that of the Chinese and Mormon Camps” (Homstad, et al. 2000:35). No photographs, histories, or lists have indicated a presence of Chinese women in the Central Pacific camps. It is very unlikely that Chinese women were present for two reasons: first, various United States laws made it almost impossible for a Chinese woman to emigrate (Williams 2008). Second, for the most part, the Chinese men who worked for the railroad signed contracts in China and came as single men to work in the United States (Williams 2008). It appears that most Chinese men came with the intention to return to China (Williams).

Mormon Women and the Transcontinental Railroad

The role of Mormon women in the Transcontinental Railroad construction has also received very little attention in past histories of the railroad. The role that these women played in the construction of the railroad through the State of Utah was often missed by the eastern and far western newspapers, as they focused on polygamy that was present among the early Mormons in the State of Utah. A reporter from the *Evening Bulletin*, a San Francisco based newspaper, wrote:

The only female Mormon face, married, that I have seen that looked at all bright, was a young wife, say third or fourth, and she looked as if she had a part to play before her husband, and her anxiety to gratify him exhibited itself painfully. To please him was the task she kept constantly before her (18 May 1869:1E).