



The Last Spike: The Great Railway, 1881-1885

Pierre Berton

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In the four years between 1881 and 1885, Canada was forged into one nation by the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway. *The Last Spike* reconstructs the incredible story of how some 2,000 miles of steel crossed the continent in just five years — exactly half the time stipulated in the contract. Pierre Berton recreates the adventures that were part of this vast undertaking: the railway on the brink of bankruptcy, with one hour between it and ruin; the extraordinary land boom of Winnipeg in 1881–1882; and the epic tale of how William Van Horne rushed 3,000 soldiers over a half-finished railway to quell the Riel Rebellion.

Dominating the whole saga are the men who made it all possible — a host of astonishing characters: Van Horne, the powerhouse behind the vision of a transcontinental railroad; Rogers, the eccentric surveyor; Onderdonk, the cool New Yorker; Stephen, the most emotional of businessmen; Father Lacombe, the black-robed voyageur; Sam Steele, of the North West Mounted Police; Gabriel Dumont, the Prince of the Prairies; more than 7,000 Chinese workers, toiling and dying in the canyons of the Fraser Valley; and many more — land sharks, construction geniuses, politicians, and entrepreneurs — all of whom played a role in the founding of the new Canada west of Ontario.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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