

(p. 197)—a conflict that resulted from the inability of Iowa communities to maintain control of their economic destinies as major railroads came to dominate state transportation patterns.

The study has its limitations. It contains a number of overstated generalizations. Connecting discussions of certain portions of Forbes's career to the major thrust of the book is sometimes difficult. At other points Larson appears to stretch to include Forbes in a consideration of issues that extend far beyond the scope of his activities. The author's description of the motives and approaches of eastern investors is far more convincing than his treatment of positions taken by farmers, merchants, and politicians in Iowa. (Protesting Iowans are often characterized as simply failing to comprehend the coming of a new economic order.)

Still, this is a useful book, worthy of review by anyone who is interested in the history of railroads, nineteenth century American economic history, or the development of government regulation in the last decades of the century. Written in a clear, if not compelling, prose, it is a good study of the process through which the development of railroads brought about fundamental changes in American attitudes and institutions.

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*The Corn Belt Route: A History of the Chicago Great Western Railroad Company.* By H. Roger Grant. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984. Pp. xi, 231. Illustrations, figures, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.00.)

This is railroad history with a new look. H. Roger Grant and his publisher have successfully blended the corporate biography with the railfan picture book to create a pleasant, brief history of the Chicago Great Western Railroad. The story begins with four chapters tracing the early firms that made up the CGW in the late nineteenth century. Gradually from this sometimes bewildering mass of details the guiding hand of CGW founder A. B. Stickney comes into view, and the railroad takes shape. The pace of the narrative picks up in chapter five, when reorganization and new leadership give tighter focus to the firm. The remaining chapters march steadily through flush times and bad, corruption, scandal, and innovation, coming to a nostalgic end in 1968 when the CGW merged into the Chicago and Northwestern. Railroad enthusiasts and local historians (especially Iowans) will find much reward in this volume. It is rich in anecdote and railbuff detail, liberally spiced with editorial copy from period small-town presses, and lavishly illustrated. The large two-

column format and the presence of art on almost every page make this book especially inviting to casual readers.

Grant's scholarly contribution is less certain. The weakness lies not in the format but in the awkward place of this railroad in history. The standard view is that the CGW should never have been built. Grant labels this "faulty logic" (p. x); he argues instead that the road provided much-needed service to isolated rural communities. But the narrative describes a speculator's railroad, a stem-only line created to raid the traffic centers by offering cheap rates while avoiding the burdens of branch-line service. There were few isolated communities rescued by CGW service. More often new construction followed "air-line" routes that purposefully bypassed existing country towns (p. 27). The company's townsite speculators had trouble locating sites in Iowa where towns were *more* than ten miles apart (p. 67). In reality, Stickney was exploiting the desires of local capitalists to strike back at monopolistic regional carriers through new competition. Grant sees this as reform, but Stickney's real objective was long-haul through traffic, not equitable local service. Stickney's maverick scheme for federally mandated "average rates" (p. 30-31) not coincidentally promised peculiar advantages for a rate-cutting air-line road with no branch network subsidizing its long hauls. In the end Congress never fixed rates, and Stickney's railroad was simply a rogue line that benefited some shippers, many of whom already enjoyed competitive service.

By wrapping the origins of the CGW in images of reform, service, and rural development, Grant deprives readers of the best reason why the CGW survived as a chronic innovator and a gadfly in the competitive interstices between larger railroad systems. Scrappy concerns like the CGW were forced to explore novelties that moved the industry—for good or ill—off dead center. Exciting experiments with gasoline motorcars and shady financing through the Brema Corporation could be seen not just as good and bad moves respectively but as equally logical products of this kind of railroad. The undulating fortunes of the CGW in the twentieth century might well document the continuing role of enterprise in a regulated, bureaucratic industry, which might in turn establish for the company the historical importance Grant seeks. But the argument is too lightly handled here; historians will want a larger frame and a more forceful interpretation of the history of the Corn Belt Route.

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