

The North American Railroad: Its Origin, Evolution, and Geography. By James E. Vance, Jr. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. Pp. xvi, 348. Maps, illustrations, tables, notes, index. \$39.95.)

Building on an erudite, somewhat theoretical explanation of the fundamental differences between the British and American rail systems, James E. Vance, Jr., discusses United States and Canadian rail development from an economic geographer's viewpoint. "It seems that little more than track gauge was successfully carried across the Atlantic," he writes, "much to our ultimate disadvantage in that case" (p. 10).

Vance contends that British roads were built to serve existing communities in densely populated areas and that capital was spent heavily on infrastructure rather than on motive power. In America, he writes, the opposite was true. Once beyond the East Coast the railroad was developmental and built cheaply into unpopulated areas, with the hope that settlers would follow. Because capital was limited and the distances were great, American roads spent relatively less on rights of way but heavily on motive power.

Vance discusses urban mercantilism and details the competitive efforts of various East Coast ports to stay alive. Even as the canals versus railroads debate flourished, Boston, which lacked water connections inland, turned to railroads to hold its market share. Some ports were misplaced, Vance writes, and only rail construction limited by geographical restraints could solve the problems. Rail development followed in a steady progression from intercity lines to regional railroads to subcontinental systems.

Before railroads adopted the standard gauge of 4 feet, 8 1/2 inches, they used varying widths as a means of protection. As the rail network expanded, however, those roads that used a nonstandard gauge to keep traffic on their lines eventually realized that the same variation prevented incoming interchange traffic from reaching them.

The Pacific Railroad Survey that led to rail construction from ocean to ocean is discussed at length with particular attention to projected routes, grades and curvature of each, and reasons for choosing the ultimate location. Construction work is described in detail. Vance also speculates on reasons why the United States has never had a truly transcontinental railroad. He touches on land grants, which he erroneously perceives as government giveaways when in reality the railroads have paid for the privilege many times over by granting reduced government rates. In addition to directing settlement by land grant construction, railroads influenced physical expansion of the country in such annexations as the Gadsden Purchase in southern Arizona.

Vance also develops a theory of natural territory and monopoly in which the geography of competition eventually substituted for the geography of terrain minimization. The book's final chapter discusses Canadian rails in depth and describes how developing Asian markets have reversed the normal traffic flow and extended the developmental phase.

Once the reader cuts through the heavy vocabulary, he finds a fascinating collection of theories and descriptions of America's rail development. Many clear, attractive, and excellently drawn maps enhance the book and add to its understanding; but, unfortunately, they contain numerous errors of chronology, geography, and nomenclature. On balance, however, the book is an important addition to railroad literature.

RICHARD S. SIMONS, Marion, Indiana, is a past vice-president of the National Railway Historical Society and was a contributing editor to *Popular Mechanics' Picture History of American Transportation* (1952).

The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815–1840. By Daniel Feller. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. Pp. xiv, 227. Bibliographical essay, index. Clothbound, \$38.95; paperbound, \$13.95.)

Daniel Feller has contributed a well-crafted addition to the interesting series, *The American Moment*, edited by Stanley Kutler and now available in twenty volumes on periods and topics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In synthesis and interpretation Feller's view of Jacksonian America is informative and attractively written. Clearly the book will be a welcome resource for general readers as well as for professors and students.

The key word in the title is "promise," which announces the author's theme. Feller has probed the literature on the age of Jackson to consider many perspectives—democratizing politics, reform movements, industrialization, presidential leadership, and a number of others. He finds the current emphasis upon a market revolution, as illustrated by Charles Sellers's recent publication, to be useful but too negative. Indeed Feller argues that despite its merit Sellers's work represents a trend that itself must be reexamined; so, after looking extensively into the evidence, he contends that too often scholars have seen the Jacksonian years as a time of approaching disaster, whether political or moral. He therefore calls for a retreat from historiographical presentism, of emphasizing what was tragic or destructive in the offing. Instead, he depicts the years, 1815–1840, as an era of optimism, of constructive change, in terms of those who were contemporaries of Old Hickory.

An effective focus of the discussion is a description of the celebration of the jubilee year 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the Dec-