
H. Roger Grant’s volume begins with a brief review of the early history of the Erie Railroad. When the broad-gauge, 447-mile Erie was completed from the Hudson River to Dunkirk on Lake Erie in 1851, the line claimed to be the longest railroad in the world. In the early 1880s the Erie acquired a line across Indiana (Decatur–Huntington–Rochester–Hammond) to Chicago. The Erie was always a weaker road than the Pennsylvania, the New York Central, and the Baltimore & Ohio, the other trunk lines from the East to Chicago. Hindered by its six-foot gauge, a less than ideal route, and financial troubles, the Erie was in bankruptcy three times before 1900. Under the leadership of Frederick Underwood, president from 1901 to 1926, the Erie became a progressive and well-operated railroad. With less able management in the depression 1930s, however, the road faced its fourth receivership in 1938.

A successful reorganization followed the receivership, and by the early 1940s heavy wartime traffic permitted a dividend on Erie common stock. The Erie early recognized the savings available through dieselization, and by 1950 more than two-thirds of all traffic was moving behind diesels. The Erie centennial celebration in 1951 improved employee morale, and common shareholders were happy with a dividend of $1.75. By the mid-1950s Erie was facing increased highway truck competition, restive labor unions, and larger deficits from its New Jersey commuter lines. Dividends on the common stock ended in 1958. Erie officials began to look around for a possible merger. The Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad (Lackawanna) was located in the same areas of New Jersey and New York that were served by the Erie. The Lackawanna, remembered as the Route of Phoebe Snow, had long been a prosperous line but after World War II faced hard times as anthracite gave way to oil as the best fuel for heating. The Erie and the Lackawanna had had extensive cooperation in the late 1950s and were merged as the Erie Lackawanna in 1960.

The 1960 merger had been preceded by only meager planning, and the larger Erie, as the senior partner, took over most of the top positions. The major savings anticipated from the merger did not appear, and by 1963 the new road was again near receivership. Under the excellent leadership of William White, a capable railroader and chairman of the line from 1963 to 1967, the Erie Lackawanna managed to survive. In 1968 the road was taken over by Dereco, a holding company controlled by the Norfolk & Western Railway. Hurricane Agnes in 1972 destroyed many of the Erie Lackawanna lines in northern Pennsylvania and southern New York, and the road was again
in bankruptcy. In 1976 major portions of the line were included in the newly formed Conrail. The remaining portions of the Erie Lackawanna, generally referred to as the “Estate,” were judiciously liquidated over the next dozen years for the benefit of the bondholders and other creditors.

Grant’s excellent and detailed review of the decline and death of a major line is unique, since most rail histories cover only a railroad’s birth and growth. The author’s extensive sources include a wealth of primary and secondary material, plus numerous interviews with dozens of Erie Lackawanna officials. Grant concludes his valuable account with the thought that the Erie Lackawanna might still have been in operation in the 1990s if the Staggers Act of 1980 (which greatly deregulated railroads) had been enacted twenty years earlier.

JOHN F. STOVER, professor emeritus of history at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, has written several books of railroad history, the last being History of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (1987).

Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America. By Sarah Burns. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996. Pp. viii, 380. Illustrations, notes, index. $50.00.)

Inventing the Modern Artist draws many fascinating parallels between the way artists behaved in the late nineteenth century and the way other people did. The most striking example, perhaps, is the artist’s studio, best exemplified by the curio-stuffed painting rooms of Hoosier William Merritt Chase at 51 West Tenth Street in New York City. The interior of the Chase establishment was well known to art lovers through illustrated articles about it in the popular press, Chase’s own painted views of his self-created environment, and the round of receptions and entertainments he held there. The latter, argues Sarah Burns, amounted to public sales: in the absence of reliable mechanisms for marketing their work, artists created their own showrooms, decorated with the same romantic, exotic trappings that department stores used to lull shoppers into impulse buying. The manly but fashionable persona of the host showing his wares was also in line with the image of the American businessman-hero of the day, solid and sound despite his extravagant surroundings. Chase might have passed for a captain of industry who had just plundered the natural resources and artistic treasures of some remote corner of the new American empire overseas!

There are some surprises in Inventing the Modern Artist, including a fresh appraisal of Winslow Homer. Even old-fashioned art historians with little interest in other kinds of history had figured out that Homer’s hunters with their slain prey and his characteristic battles between sailors and the sea had something to do with Social Darwinism and the mechanics of relentless capitalism. But Burns draws a sharp portrait of a shrewd businessman with a taste for sub-