

REVIEWS

"Follow the Flag"

A History of the Wabash Railroad Company

By H. Roger Grant

(DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004. Pp. xii, 291. Maps, illustrations, notes, index. \$49.95.)

Although it dates to 1838, the Wabash Railroad has not, until now, been the subject of a serious book-length study. H. Roger Grant corrects this oversight by examining the Wabash from its obscure beginning in Central Illinois, to its expansion as a vital regional carrier, and finally through its acquisition by the Norfolk and Western Railway.

The author of previous books on the Erie-Lackawanna, Chicago and Northwestern, and Chicago Great Western Railroads, Grant has researched the Wabash thoroughly and presents his findings in a readable, well-illustrated manner. Numerous maps help clarify geographic factors, although a few additional maps would have helped. Grant explains how numerous short lines were connected to produce significant railroads and then evolved into a unique

system that operated on each side of both the Chicago and St. Louis gateways.

Through numerous leasing, bankruptcies, and reorganizations, the company retained the name "Wabash" as if to display its pride in its Hoosier heritage. The railroad's original eastern main line extended from Toledo, Ohio, to St. Louis, via Ft. Wayne and the Wabash Valley. For many years, Peru served as division point, shop town, and the location (until 1964) of one of four hospitals operated by the Wabash Employees Hospital Association. A second line—most of it now abandoned—was built across Indiana's northern tier of counties in 1893 to shorten the distance between Detroit and Chicago. A third line, along the Eel River between Logansport and Butler, was leased for use in a New York-St. Louis road.

After a long-running court battle, it was returned to its original owner; the Wabash then built a new connection from its original main line, near Ft. Wayne, to Butler, where it connected with a road to Detroit.

In the early 1880s, Jay Gould, the bad boy of nineteenth-century railroading, gained control of the Wabash, which he visualized as the central link in an ocean-to-ocean system. After Gould's death in 1892, his son, George, continued the father's plans, including an 1898 extension on trackage rights over the Grand Trunk across southern Ontario to Buffalo, N.Y., and a disastrous attempt to locate a terminal in Pittsburgh in 1904. The younger Gould also improved the northern Indiana route and added use of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas line, between Hannibal and Moberly, Mo., which created a faster route from the East to Kansas City.

During the 1920s, the Wabash continued to expand. It acquired the Ann Arbor, a Michigan line, as well as the 11-mile New Jersey, Indiana, and Illinois Railroad (which entered

South Bend) in 1926, and a switching road, the Lake Erie and Ft. Wayne, in 1929. During the same period, the Pennsylvania Railroad acquired stock control of the Wabash.

Taking its cue from a favorite hobo ballad, the Wabash fielded a fleet of Wabash Cannonball passenger trains, but later discontinued the name. In 1950, however, it restored the name to its premier St. Louis-Detroit train and adopted the name for its fleet of fast freights.

Although it occupied a strategic location in mid-America and linked some of the country's most vibrant cities, the Wabash underwent numerous bankruptcies. Still, the railway always landed on its feet until 1964, when the Norfolk and Western leased and then acquired it, at last erasing a proud name from the *Official Railway Guide*.

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