The New Town Square is best, then, considered as a memoir, a compilation of the author's recollections of places, artifacts, and individuals interspersed with ruminations on change and community. Viewed from this perspective, the book offers informative and entertaining vignettes that convey at once the author's personality and a sense of the distinctiveness of the sites he has inhabited, turning the book itself into a crossroads of America, a new and exciting town square.

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Encyclopedia of North American Railroads

Edited by William D. Middleton, George M. Smerk, and Roberta L. Diehl

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. Pp. xii, 1281. Illustrations, references, appendices, index. $99.95.)

An assemblage of North America's best railroad historians has produced an exceptionally fine reference source on the industry they (and millions around the world) love. The encyclopedia includes more than one thousand pages of alphabetical entries on railroad companies, railroad executives, railroad technology and engineering, construction, management, labor, operations, locomotives and cars, railroad builders and suppliers, railroad business practices, railroad regulation and political economy, and more. Entries on railroad signaling and operations are extensive enough to show a complete novice how it all works. The emphasis on North America allows for extensive entries on Canada and Mexico, as well as smaller ones on Central America and the Caribbean, although the encyclopedia is primarily U.S.-oriented.

Among the entries are a number of unexpected but fascinating items—for example, those focused on agricultural development, argot (slang), architecture, and art—and that is just the letter A. There are entries on the circus, cinema, even opera—the latter including a wonderful picture of diva Mary Garden and the entire Metropolitan Opera entourage high in the Bitterroot Mountains on their special Milwaukee Road train en route to the West Coast. There is an entry on Alexander Hamilton, who died long before the railroad was invented but whose policies laid the foundation of the great national economy that the railroad would eventually make possible. There are entries on women, sports, health, even the fish cars that were used to stock distant water-

sheds. So much information is packed in each of these entries that the extensive index is indispensable.

One of the best features is a series of introductory essays—one on railroad development, one on the social impact of the railroad (the many ways it touched the lives of people), two on technology, and one on the transformation of the railroad since 1970. These essays give a thoughtful overview of matters that many who care about trains often know little about.

This work is not only packed with information, but it is just plain fun to flip from entry to entry, letting your curiosity wander. It is a must for anyone with a mature interest in railroads. It is also an excellent point of entry for anyone developing an interest in railroads (starting at about age 12).

Problems are trumped by the book's great strengths. There is not nearly enough on the economics of railroads—what the companies and their workers actually did for a living. The maps are weak, not because they are bad maps but because they are placed in a single appendix at the back of the book. Telling a railroad story requires a map specific to the details under discussion in front of the reader. Statistics are weak—like the maps, they are grouped in a single appendix. They are minimal and break nothing down by individual railroad. Some entries seem not to have grasped the changes that have transformed the industry in the last thirty years. For example, an entry on marketing talks only about the promotion of passenger trains through the 1950s. Today the concept of marketing is a tool to sell freight service that includes a precise knowledge of costs, so that a railroad knows exactly how low it can bid on particular kinds of traffic and still make money. There is duplication. For example, an entry on Canadian railroad development plows much the same territory as the entries on the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railways that precede it. There are disturbing omissions. For example, on the list of significant railroad accidents, the wreck of the *Broker* in 1951 is not included, even though the Pennsylvania Railroad was indicted on eighty-three counts of manslaughter in New Jersey and a national spotlight was thrown on the enveloping problems of what was then the nation's premier carrier.

Nevertheless, this volume is a must investment and an important addition to any railroad library.

RICHARD SAUNDERS JR., is professor of history at Clemson University. He is the author of *Merging Lines and Main Lines* (2003) on the changing economics of North American railroads in the century.