

Grass Between the Rails

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Donovan L. Hofsommer

Grass Between The Rails, by Denny Rehder and Cecil Cook. Des Moines: Waukon and Mississippi Press, 1973. 208 pp. \$7.95 hardcover, \$4.95 paperback.

Grass Between The Rails is the story of a branch line railroad—the Milwaukee Road's now defunct Waukon line in extreme northeast Iowa. The operation began in 1877 as the Waukon and Mississippi Railroad Company, a twenty-three-mile independent narrow gauge carrier which was designed to link Waukon, the county seat of Allamakee County, with the outside world. Its route traversed some of the most dramatically beautiful scenery in Iowa; but that same beauty simultaneously prompted innumerable headaches for the road's construction engineers. As a result, the line was built with tight curves and heavy grades; in the early days, it took no less than three hours for the train to make the short twenty-three-mile trip. Eventually the Waukon and Mississippi passed to the CM & Stp and was standard gauged. It survived natural disasters and corporate warfare but finally succumbed to hardtop roads and long-haul trucking. Service on the line ended in 1970 and the tracks were dismantled in the following season.

Among the many who indulged themselves in a love affair with this particular railroad were Denny Rehder and Cecil Cook, the authors of this study. Both were from northeast Iowa and Cook especially developed an affection for "the branch." As a youngster, and even as an adult, Cook pursued his interest in the operation of the road and, happily, recorded much of its later history on film. Over 160 photographs garnish the book; many are Cook's own. While this is primarily the story of the Waukon Branch, it is also a study of the area which it served and of the people who depended on it for their transportation needs. The story reads moderately well but the narrative should have been tightened up by the strong hand of a competent editor. Professionals will grumble that the work is not documented; there is no bibliography and no footnoting. They

will also note that the authors often tend to be overly nostalgic in their treatment. Nevertheless, by dealing with the history often neglected—Rehder and Cook have made a definite contribution to the greater knowledge of railroading in middle America. Thus their *Grass Between The Rails* is recommended to railroad buffs and to railroad historians alike.

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Glenda Riley McIntosh

Patterns and Perspectives in Iowa History, edited by Dorothy Schwieder. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1973. pp. 478.

IN ITS COMMENDABLE TRADITION of attempting to supply teachers and students of Iowa history with recent and meaningful information, Iowa State Press has published a collection of notable essays titled *Patterns and Perspectives in Iowa History*, compiled by Dorothy Schwieder. As editor, Schwieder has exercised her extensive knowledge of both Iowa history and its available materials. Schwieder, who holds the B.A. and M.S. degrees, is teaching Iowa history at Iowa State University. In addition, she is a regular participant on the WOI weekly radio program "Iowa Heritage," has published several articles on aspects of Iowa history, and is a member of the Board of Curators of the State Historical Society of Iowa.

The primary emphasis of this collection is social history which Schwieder hoped would help the reader "develop a sense and feeling for these Americans of the past," as well as to understand "their achievements, their frustrations, and their heartaches, as well as their persona." The introductory essay by Thomas T. McAvoy dealing with the Midwestern mind is a significant move towards this goal as well as a most thoughtful and insightful examination of commonly-held stereotypes regarding the people of the Midwestern states.

The articles which follow share the common theme of concern

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