

Iowa's Railroads: An Album

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Iowa's Railroads: An Album, by H. Roger Grant and Don L. Hofsommer. Railroads Past & Present Series. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009. xii, 308 pp. Maps, illustrations. \$59.95 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

Reviewer William Friedrichs is professor of history and director of the Iowa History Center at Simpson College. He is also the editor of a new book series with the University of Iowa Press titled *Iowa and the Midwest Experience*.

Marketed as a companion volume to Don Hofsommer's earlier history of Iowa railroads, *Steel Trails of Hawkeyeland* (2005), *Iowa's Railroads: An Album* is an expansive, pictorial version of the same story told through nearly 500 black-and-white photographs, maps, and illustrations.

Following a brief introduction, the album chronicles Iowa's railroads from their beginnings in the 1850s to the current era of mega-mergers and retrenchment. Divided into seven topical chapters organized chronologically, each section opens with several pages of text, outlining the story and setting the table for the main course: railroad photographs that illustrate the authors' deep knowledge and abiding love of the subject. Grant and Hofsommer, both native Iowans and respected railroad historians, have mined a wide variety of public and private photo collections, and the result is a visual feast of Iowa's railroad experience. The pages are filled with images of locomotives, freight cars and passenger cars, depots and stations, tunnels and bridges, and round-houses and shop facilities over the period and throughout the state.

Although illustrations of equipment and buildings undoubtedly have the starring role, the authors do discuss the railroads' broad impact on Iowa history. In possibly the most interesting section, Grant and Hofsommer explore the human side of the story by reminding us of the thousands of jobs the labor-intensive railroads provided Iowans. With well-chosen photos and succinct text, the authors offer a glimpse into the work of engineers and firemen, conductors and car stewards, porters and waiters, station agents and machinists.

The oversized volume will appeal to railroad enthusiasts and model railroaders, who should avoid the mistake of skimming the book's photo captions. Grant and Hofsommer often accompany photos with important details. In general, the captions reveal just how integral railroads were to Iowa's social and cultural fabric as well as its business and economic life. More specifically, they sometimes furnish intriguing information, such as the fact that Richard Sears, later of Sears & Roebuck fame, once worked as a telegraph operator for the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway in Lake Mills, Iowa. Those who want a more thorough account of railroads in Iowa should start with Hofsommer's *Steel Trails of Hawkeyeland*.