Minneapolis and the Age of Railways

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Springer funded artistic projects as well, including museum murals in Santa Fe. He helped shape New Mexico Normal University, served on the boards of the School of American Archaeology and the Museum of New Mexico, and supported the development of Santa Fe’s distinctly revised architectural style. Like many successful businessmen in the Progressive Era, Springer eventually moved east. He lived most of his last 20 years in Washington and Philadelphia, dying in 1927.

This is a well-written and well-researched book, although it ascribes a political appointment to President Hayes that was actually one of President Arthur’s (71). It provides a balanced assessment of an Iowan who became successful in a new frontier, became a respected paleontologist, and was an active university regent, museum board member, and philanthropist. Readers interested in the impact of Iowans on the greater nation will enjoy this volume.


Reviewer Kevin B. Byrne is professor of history at Gustavus Adolphus College. His research has focused on the history of railroads, technology, and the military. Don Hofsommer knows railroad history, and in this volume he draws deeply on his extensive knowledge, recounting the rise and decline of the relationship between Minneapolis and many of its railways. The prominence of more than 200 black-and-white photographs, maps, and other illustrations—many of them full-page—make this book appropriate for a coffee table, but Hofsommer’s prose constitutes its heart. Although the book ostensibly covers the period from the 1850s to the 1970s, the focus in all but the final chapter is on the years from 1860 to 1920, often using the history of the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railroad as a vehicle for the story. Narrating the chronicle of that railway, which was begun largely by area milling interests, Hofsommer weaves together the complex history of Minneapolis railroads with the economic and population growth of the Mill City, the burgeoning state of Minnesota, and the upper Midwest.

Viewing the subject chiefly from a business history perspective, Hofsommer is sympathetic to the viewpoint of railroad managers, some of whom lend their colorful personalities to the story. The history also touches on Iowa, its northern regions in particular, due to their trading relationship with Minneapolis, as grain and coal went north while flour and lumber came south. Larger railroad combina-
tions, including several important to Iowans, eventually serviced Minneapolis as it reached out to an enormous economic hinterland that ultimately extended to the West Coast. In sum, Hofsommer and the University of Minnesota Press have produced a history that will interest railroad buffs and local historians alike.


Reviewer David M. Anderson is assistant professor of history at Louisiana Tech University. He is completing a book manuscript titled The Battle for Main Street, U.S.A.: The 1955 Perfect Circle Strike and the Myth of Heartland Consensus.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Midwest underwent a profound economic transformation that made it a center of industrial capitalism with Chicago as its hub. That transformation produced massive wealth, created great individual fortunes, and attracted millions of European immigrants, but it came at the cost of an unstable economy, vast social inequality, and bloody episodes of class conflict that still stand as the labor movement’s historical touchstones.

In Death in the Haymarket, labor historian James Green claims that the most important of these episodes occurred at Chicago’s Haymarket Square on May 4, 1886, near the end of a rally organized by local anarchists to protest the killing of four strikers a day earlier during a citywide general strike for the eight-hour day. As city police moved in to break up the rally, a bomb exploded, and amid the ensuing confusion, seven police officers and three civilians were killed, and scores were wounded. In the bombing’s aftermath, eight anarchists, none of whom had actually thrown the bomb, were tried and found guilty in what amounted to a show trial. Four anarchists were hanged, one committed suicide while awaiting execution, and the other three were eventually pardoned. For Green, an ideal of civic unity also died at the end of the same hangman’s noose that choked the life out of the Chicago anarchists. The event, he concludes, “marked a turning point in American history—a moment when our industrial relations could have developed in a different, less conflicted way,” but instead “ushered in fifty years of recurrent industrial violence” (319).

Green sees the Haymarket bombing as the climax of two decades of increasing civic polarization. He opens the book in May 1865, when Abraham Lincoln’s funeral train passed through Chicago, the last moment when city residents stood together in unity. From that point on,