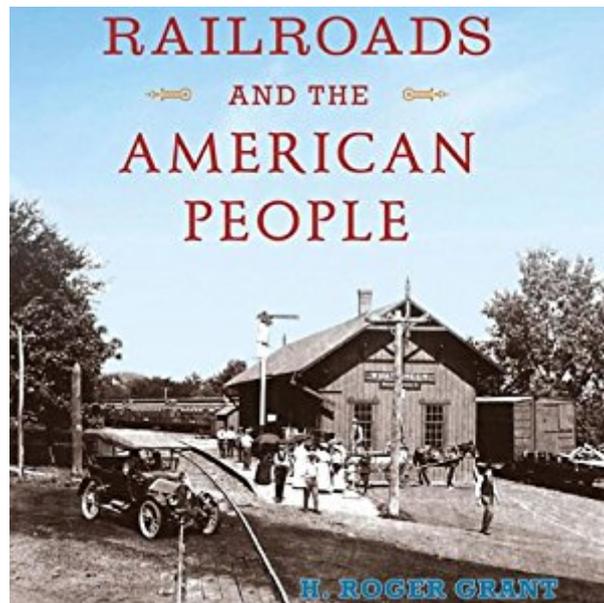


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# Railroads And The American People: Railroads Past And Present



## Synopsis

In this social history of the impact of railroads on American life, H. Roger Grant concentrates on the railroad's "Golden Age," 1830-1930. To capture the essence of the nation's railroad experience, Grant explores four fundamental topics - trains and travel, train stations, railroads and community life, and the legacy of railroading in America. Grant recalls the lasting memories left by train travel, both of luxurious Pullman cars and the grit and grind of coal-powered locals. He discusses the important role railroads played for towns and cities across America, not only for the access they provided to distant places and distant markets but also for the depots that were a focus of community life. Finally, Grant reviews the lasting heritage of the railroads as it has been preserved in word, stone, paint, and memory. *Railroads and the American People* is a sparkling paean to American railroading by one of its finest historians. The book is published by Indiana University Press.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

For those of us old enough to remember train travel or those having worked on or with railroads for part of their life as have I [working as a gandy-dancer or laborer repairing track while attending college in the 1960s] this brings back memories of railroading both good and bad. Fixing rails in 100 degree heat wasn't fun, but travel on trains was still a big adventure in the 1950s. For those not of such an age, this is a great book to learn all about railroading and how it changed the history of our country. The author divides the book into four main sections - trains and train travel, train stations,

railroads and how they affected community life, and the legacy that railroading has left us today. The book is printed on a high quality glossy paper, which is important as there are well over 100 B/W plates to help visualize the prose. As for the prose itself, the author speaks in a friendly rather than pedagogical voice, making it easy and fun to read. The book is full of fact, but the history is told as by someone you know simply relating a story to you. The primary years covered are 1830 to 1930, but the author does continue on with his history to the present. An interesting fact that I found is that the maximum track mileage of 254,251 miles was achieved way back in 1916 and has progressively gotten smaller due to planes and primarily trucks able to use the interstate highway system to haul freight. The author also discusses Railroad Post Offices and the Railway Express Agency, both of which primarily disappeared by the end of the 1960s.

H. Roger Grant is the Head of the History Department at Clemson University in South Carolina and has written or co-authored at least histories of the Wabash "Follow the Flag": A History of the Wabash Railroad Company (Railroads in America), the Erie-Lackawanna Erie Lackawanna: The Death of an American Railroad, 1938-1992 and the Chicago and North Western railroads and a total of 28 rail history books. Professor Grant is the President of the Lexington Transportation History Group, a society mainly of transportation historians and leaders, and along with Lexington Group Treasurer and Newsletter Editor Professor Don Hofshommer of St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, MN, (whom he often collaborates with) is one of the foremost railroad historians in the United States. This book, which takes a largely sociological approach is not dull economic and financial history, but a very readable description of the role railroads played and play in American society. It describes locomotives, municipal rivalries, industries, passenger travel, stations, heroes, villains and the narrative of American transportation in an enjoyable and informative broad brush approach. Having been trained as a historian my only gripe with Professor Grant's scholarship is when he deviates from railroading and describes the shameful internment of Japanese-Americans as "America's Gulag" in describing the role US railroads played in World War II.

Judging by the cover and glossy paper, this could be the pinnacle of rail texts. Partway through, while bogged in a passage that mixed events in non-consecutive fashion, I reviewed Grant's prologue: to examine the Trains, Stations, Communities and Legacy of railroads. He is most informative when comparing the variety of solutions used to build these steel arteries throughout the U.S. Trains were the first transportation alternative to horses and wagons, but there were multiple brands and the machinery always evolving. Photos are well-captioned and identify the train's name,

location or year. Cars appeared first as drafty, jolting wagons- wooden seats exposed to wind-driven cinders. Maximum speeds were low- accidents occurring when the crew dared to speed up. Stops for fuel and water extended the agony. Stations were adapted to the traffic, local building materials; eventually following standardized plans published by each carrier. Sometimes stone structures or rude board-and-batten structures that received shipments, mail, provided space for stationmaster/ticket sales, a telegrapher, and passenger waiting area. These eventually morphed into bus and airport terminals- which stole passenger business. Trucks assumed much freight hauling. Communities were not all metropolises surrounding a 'Grand' Station, but stations did attract hotels, diners, businesses of all sorts. During the latter part of the 1800s, many towns were built in the newly opened western territories. Settlers, even immigrants, would unload possessions and animals from rude cars and go claim homesteads. If fortunate, they prospered. If not, they moved on. During the massive troop movements during WW II, North Platte, Nebraska was a busy stop.

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