

Book Reviews

Iron Road to the West: American Railroads in the 1850's

By JOHN F. STOVER. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978. Pp. xii, 266. \$14.95.

Almost a quarter of a century ago George Rogers Taylor and Irene D. Neu set a high standard for writers of railroad history with the publication of *The American Railroad Network, 1861-1890*. Since that time, Professor John Stover of Purdue University has been, for the past decade and more, the premier author of works on both scholarly and popular railroad history in the United States. To say that *Iron Road to the West* might be considered as a kind of "preliminary sequel" to the highly regarded *American Railroad Network* is to give a generous bow of respect to both volumes.

At first glance one might wonder what a book devoted to American railroads in the 1850s would have to say to those primarily interested in the history of Illinois. The answer is, it has a great deal to say about Illinois and about the forces that molded and shaped the Prairie State in the mid-century years. No state felt the impact of the "iron horse" more keenly than did Illinois, nor did any state benefit more directly in the transformation that the railroad wrought.

The theme of Stover's volume is the growth and expansion of American railroads from "a scattering of short lines" along the East Coast

prior to 1850, to "a solid iron network" serving every state east of the Mississippi River by 1860. We are inclined to think of politics as dominating the decade that preceded the Civil War. The continuing controversy over slavery in the territories drove the nation from crisis to crisis (warning of the "house dividing") and clearly occupied the center of the stage. But what we have presented here is another and perhaps equally significant side of the 1850s. During this tumultuous decade more than twenty thousand miles of railroad were built, completely revolutionizing American transportation. Of that total, more than twenty-five hundred were constructed in Illinois. No other business operated on so vast a scale, was financed from such a variety of sources, employed such a wide range of human skills, or moved so rapidly to catch up with the line of frontier settlement as that line pushed beyond the Mississippi River in the mid-century years.

Master of the subject that he is, Stover manages to pick his way through the welter of early railroad charters and subsequent name changes with only an occasional slip and no real falls! Keen students of Illinois transportation history

will be surprised to find the Springfield-Decatur segment of the Great Western line complete on the 1855 map (page 127) but apparently incomplete in 1860 (page 138). Some would also be inclined to credit Charles Ellet, Jr.—rather than John Roebling—with the building of the Wheeling, Virginia, suspension bridge (page 134) and will wonder at the reference to Poor's *Manual for 1980* (page 237, footnote 3). But most of all they will be impressed and delighted with the service that Professor Stover has performed in making sense and synthesis out of a wilderness of unbelievable detail.

One of the hidden virtues of the volume (though the author makes no great point of it) is the way in which it explores and illuminates the always lively question of why the North won the Civil War. Though he did not choose to do so, Stover might well have subtitled his book "How the North Won the Civil War." Indeed, one wonders whether the war could have been won (which is another way of asking, in Lincoln's words, whether the Union could have been saved) without the "Iron Road to the West."

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Illinois! Illinois! An Annotated Bibliography of Fiction

By THOMAS L. KILPATRICK AND PATSY-ROSE HOSHICO. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1979. Pp. x, 617. \$27.50.

All that you wanted to know about Illinois fiction but were disinclined to research for yourself—that's the implied promise made by bibliographers Kilpatrick and Hoshiko in their collection *Illinois! Illinois!* From approximately seven thousand possible fictional works pertaining to the region known as Illinois, they have identified 1,554 selections. They further provide a brief annotation on plot or theme, an occasional comment on literary significance or historical accuracy, and often a pithy qualitative evaluation of the work. The result is highlights of Illinois fiction useful for neophyte or connoisseur.

For purposes of this project the authors have defined Illinois fiction as "any fictional work set entirely or in part in Illinois, including works based on events in Illinois history or events influencing Illinois' development, story collections in which a significant number of the stories have Illinois backgrounds, and fictionalized accounts of lives of Illinois citizens" (page vii). While that functional definition is encompassing, practical limitations precluded the compilation of a comprehensive roster of all fiction pertaining to Illinois. Nevertheless, the bibliography is representative of works published between 1828 (*The Life and Adventures of Arthur Clenning* by Timothy Flint, entry 31) and 1976 (*Chicago* by Charles Carroll, entry 1310) and

therefore contains an overview of Illinois as a literary region. For those of us less familiar than the authors with the cornucopia of literary works pertaining to Illinois, their suggestions for additional reading are compelling, enticing, and varied. Libraries throughout the state will wish to order reference copies for casual readers, teachers, and students.

This collection spans the Illinois experience in a variety of ways. There's the likely subject of Abraham Lincoln as represented by Ida M. Tarbell's *He Knew Lincoln* (entry 229) and the unlikely topic of the tariff presented by John B. Holmes's *Brombeau* (entry 156). In addition, there's a precursor of modern-day feminism in Helen T. Aschmann's *Connie Bell, M.D.* (entry 287), a substantial attention to humor as embodied in the observations of Finley Peter Dunne (entries 417-31), and significant social reform featured in the works of Theodore Dreiser (entries 407-10). Readers with a variety of preferences will find guidance in selection of works to improve their understanding of the Illinois setting and its history. The collaborators are to be complimented on a service well performed.

The serious scholar of America's literary production will also benefit from the professional manner in which the compilation is presented.

The five chapters are arranged chronologically, and each contains a brief historical summary that provides the context for the fictional works presented. The most space is given to the period from 1861 to 1914, and the subject/place name index indicates Chicago has the greatest appeal as an environment for fictional treatment. Using the author/title index one can find not only the citation for the single volume from the pen of an obscure author, but also for the profuse production of the dime novelists or detective writers and for the literary contribution of recognized

authors represented by Pulitzer or other prizes. Additional research aids are the book review sources provided after most entries. Users will appreciate the painstaking attention to detail as is shown in the consideration of reprints, revised editions, differences in editions, and cross-referencing of entries across time periods. Only an occasional typographical error mars the professional appearance of this volume.

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