

Book Notices

The Denver and Rio Grande Project, 1870-1901: A History of the First Thirty Years of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad, by O. Meredith Wilson. Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1982. xv, 125 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$18.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper.

Although *The Denver and Rio Grande Project* was written as a dissertation under the direction of Frederick Paxson in 1942, and although railroad historians, including D&RG historian Robert Athearn, have used it and appreciated its quality, it has waited until now for publication. Certainly some of Wilson's goals for it, including making it "the final chapter in my ambition to understand America from its Tudor-Stuart roots to the forms and structure that resulted in independence and occupation of the West," (xiii) will seem to most readers overdrawn, it was one of the pioneering railroad studies to be drawn from primary sources in the possession of the corporation and remains a useful work, especially strong in analyzing strategy and in following construction detail.

Although the coverage extends to 1900 and the George Gould era, the bulk of this brief book concerns construction, financing, strategy, and engineering before 1890 and contains some fascinating insight into the response of towns to the building of the narrow gauge. Wilson had an "executive pass" to ride the D&RG in the 1940s when most of the narrow gauge line was still in operation, and he supplemented his research in company engineering records and minutes with rides all over the spectacular trackage, sometimes in a handcar. Many of the illustrations in this attractively printed book are engineering drawings, and while the concentration on construction detail might seem a recipe for tedium, Wilson's wit and style, as well as his ability to place these details in the broader context of officers' strategy, rescues the work from that fate. However, it remains true that Athearn's *Rebel of the Rockies* is considerably the most readable early history of the D&RG. A comparison, for example, of Wilson's treatment of the Royal Gorge War of 1878 with Athearn's reveals strengths in both, but makes it evident that Athearn is the social historian of the two.

The publication of this volume adds important elements to material easily available on the Rio Grande. Scholars might wish for foot-

notes and a bibliography, particularly because of Wilson's access to corporate primary material, some of which may not now exist. Still, the use of that material is obvious in the text and makes it truly authoritative as an account of engineering and internal financing strategy on the Rio Grande in the 1870s and 1880s. People other than William Jackson Palmer himself remain somewhat in the background, but no good book tries to accomplish everything.

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The Colorado Front Range: A Landscape Divided, by Gleaves Whitney. Boulder: Johnson Books, 1983. xii, 164 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, place-names index, facts list. \$8.95 paper.

The Colorado Front Range is the series of nine mountain chains which travelers from the East would first see when approaching Colorado's Rocky Mountains. It offers a magnetic, magnificent backdrop for the state's heaviest urban settlement and contains Rocky Mountain National Park to the north and Pike's Peak—the view from which inspired the words of "America the Beautiful"—to the south. The piedmont area at the Front Range's foot, not surprisingly, had attracted, as of 1980, a population of over 2,450,000 to its 16,000 square mile "urban corridor": Greeley, Ft. Collins, Boulder, Denver, Colorado Springs, and Pueblo, from north to south. There people enjoy proximity to "purple mountain majesties" and to skiing, relatively mild climates, enough spring runoff to keep agriculture afloat, and the stimulation of a fast-paced latter-day frontier. There people also endure rapidly growing crime rates, an explosion of "little boxes on the hillsides," increasing air pollution, groundwater overdrafting, and unpredictable periods of drought and flashflooding. Growth has brought to the area phenomena we most often associate with southern California.

Gleaves Whitney is among those who have stepped forward with warnings and advice for his fellow Coloradoans. His *Colorado Front Range: A Landscape Divided* presents the region's assets and liabilities so eloquently that it could serve as a model for similar studies of other regions. In this 9 1/2 x 6 3/4-inch, paperbound book, illustrated with only small black and white photographs, Whitney paints the Front Range's colorful natural and human history with a palette of lyrical language and dramatic emphasis. Front Range place names, geology, climate, vegetation, prehistory, native culture, fur trading, mining, farming, ranching, and all elements of modern urban life receive Whitney's concise but impressively thorough attention. Yet he has

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