

find different stories in the images. Photographs of extant Iowa institutions at Clarinda and Independence invite Iowa residents to reassess their understanding of the hulking structures, and provide tempting invitations to revisit the structures not just as enigmatic ruins, but also as crucial to understanding the economic, architectural, and labor histories of these communities as well as communities in their own right.

The Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway: A Photographic History, by Don L. Hofsommer. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. ix, 296 pp. Photographs, maps. \$79.95 cloth, \$49.95 paper.

Reviewer Jamie Beranek is a researcher and a volunteer in special collections at the State Historical Society of Iowa. He lives in Cedar Rapids.

When I started Don L. Hofsommer's *The Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway: A Photographic History*, I decided to put a Post-it note alongside each photograph that I especially liked. Four readings and two pads of Post-its later, the margins of my review copy looked like a forest of yellow. The photos in this book are that good.

Hofsommer is a prolific writer on railroads, especially those of the upper Midwest. The Minneapolis & St. Louis (M&StL) — “my” railroad, as Hofsommer calls it by dint of having grown up in various Iowa towns along its lines — is clearly his favorite. This book could be considered a pictorial companion to his exhaustive history of the M&StL, *The Tootin' Louie* (2005). In fact, though, it can stand on its own.

The M&StL was conceived in 1870 by Minneapolis businessmen who wanted rail connections to the outside besides those offered by the Chicago- and Milwaukee-oriented railroads then existing. Its purpose was to transport wheat and coal to Minneapolis and to carry out flour and lumber. At its peak, the railroad had 1,600 miles of track reaching from Minneapolis to central South Dakota, southern and central Iowa, Peoria in Illinois, and, by various connections, St. Louis. Always plagued by short hauls and competition from much larger railroads, the M&StL's history was marked by two receiverships, periods of modest prosperity, genteel poverty, and a post-World War II renaissance before finally being undone by the truck and the automobile. It was merged into the Chicago & North Western Railroad in 1960; much of its mileage has since been abandoned.

The book is divided into six chapters, each corresponding to particular periods in the railroad's history and each prefaced by a brief summary of the years in question. Here, as in *The Tootin' Louie*, Hofsommer infuses life into each period by discussing not only the financial and managerial history of the railroad but the nitty-gritty of its

operations — passenger train schedules and equipment, freight operations, and locomotive assignments, for example.

Then come the photographs, showing trains, structures, and employees not in isolation but in their working environments going about the business of moving people and goods. Many are rich in atmosphere and detail. A few favorites: a passenger train conductor and brakeman, dignified in appearance and haughty in demeanor in their three-piece uniforms and requisite hats, standing with four dapper men on the platform at Hanska, Minnesota (68); a spectacularly detailed 1916 view of the spacious office at the Madison, Minnesota, depot, showing the agent, telegrapher, and depot helper amid the tools and furniture of their trade (62); and, my favorite, a turn-of-the-century exterior photo of the two-story depot in Madison, Minnesota. The portly agent sporting an impressive handlebar mustache is standing on the platform clad in suspenders but wearing his agent's cap; to his left are four track laborers on a hand-powered section car; behind are two other men, possibly local depot loafers; and at the baggage room end of the depot, three little boys, all barefoot, take in the scene. What catches one's eye, though, on closer examination, is the decorative curtain hanging in one of the upstairs windows, a reminder that the building was not only the agent's workplace but his — and his family's — home as well (16–17).

There are many more. Besides the often atmospheric subject matter, Hofsommer has chosen the unexpected viewpoint — the bird's-eye aerial, the candid, the close-up — and varied the layout, from multiple photos per page to stand-out two-page reproductions such as the Madison depot exterior mentioned above.

If I have a criticism, it is one I raised in my earlier review of *The Tootin' Louie* — namely, the lack of a single, detailed map of the M&StL at its peak. Throughout the book, Hofsommer recounts the construction and slow abandonment of the railroad's component lines. The town names come fast and furious; without a map this history is very hard to follow. The kind of map that is needed — one that shows all the towns on each line — is actually partially reproduced on the book's back cover. Unfortunately, it is there only as a design element and is of no help in plotting locations.

Otherwise, the book is a treasure for anyone — you don't have to be a fan of the M&StL — who relishes good photographs and the drama and atmosphere of midwestern railroading.