

And I think that is exactly her intent: to inspire questions about the people and places that have made Minnesota what it is today. Every state should have a history like this, which recalls the WPA guides, sometimes idiosyncratic accounts but always conveying a particular voice and a distinct perspective. Readers don't rely on volumes such as these for "The Truth," but for a way into the complex reality of a state, which is a problematic concept right now. Despite the academic "interrogation" of the term "state," many people think of themselves as "Minnesotan" or "Iowan." A book like this, then, might almost be seen as the start of a wiki on Minnesota history, where others can add the milling material to supplement Atkins's basic perspective.

Annette Atkins may have modeled a twenty-first century state history. But this book isn't for everyone. If readers are looking for the "definitive word" on a subject, or for systematic coverage, then they should consult earlier systematizers such as W. W. Folwell, Theodore Blegen, William Lass, or Clifford Clark. But because those books do exist, there's no need to do them again. For generalists interested in vivid stories and informed reflection on what historical patterns become "Minnesotan," this is your book.

*Minnesota 150: The People, Places, and Things that Shape Our State*, by Kate Roberts. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2007. xv, 224 pp. Illustrations, essay on sources, index. \$19.95 paper.

Reviewer Kristin Elmquist is a high school social studies teacher in Minnesota. Her background is in cultural anthropology and immigration history.

*Minnesota 150* is the result of an enormous project created to coincide with the state's 150th birthday. The goal was simple: to create a collection of people, places, and things that promoted change within or outside of Minnesota, and display that collection in a book and an exhibit at the Minnesota History Center. The public was invited to submit nominations and make a case for why each choice merited consideration, and the list was narrowed by exhibit planners and historians. The resulting 150 choices range from the general (immigrants) to the specific (SPAM), from the famous (Charles Lindbergh) to the obscure (Frederick McKinley Jones, an African American migrant to Minnesota who invented refrigeration units for trucks). The collection includes events from prehistory (the ancient tropical sea that created the limestone from which the Twin Cities is built) to modern figures (Prince).

Readers may take issue with some of the choices, and that is part of the project's value. The arbitrary nature of the 150 final choices and the

wide range of entries make it inappropriate to read this as a comprehensive reference on all that is significant to Minnesota. Rather, the project engages the public in history making by starting conversations (or arguments) about what the state's history is, or should be. This is a successful example of history telling as an ongoing debate, open to a variety of interpretations. A project like this would be valuable for any state, to encourage its inhabitants to play a role in telling their own story.

*Rails to the North Star: A Minnesota Railroad Atlas*, by Richard S. Prosser. The Fesler-Lampert Minnesota Heritage Book Series. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. xiv, 285 pp. Notes, maps, illustrations, bibliography, appendixes, index. \$29.95 paper.

Reviewer Kevin Byrne is professor of history at Gustavus Adolphus College. His areas of interest include railroad, political, and military history and the history of technology.

As railroad historian Don Hofsommer observes in his foreword, *Rails to the North Star* is "a masterful catalog of data" (xii). This reprint of a 1966 book is all of that. Author Richard Prosser referred to the endeavor as "essentially a library-oriented project" that covered "all facets of railroad development" (xiii). Compiled to celebrate a centennial of Minnesota railroad history, the volume met its goals admirably when it first appeared and remains useful today.

*Rails to the North Star* opens with a 115-page history of Minnesota railroads. Short chapters of ten or fewer pages tell the story chronologically, and other chapters add information on specific themes such as logging railroads and urban lines. The narrative is factual, straightforward, and descriptive, providing essential information, some judgments by its railroad-enthusiast author, and a few digressions. More than half the volume, however, is a compendium of documents derived mainly from Minnesota Railroad & Warehouse Commission records. There are short entries on every railroad company that built or planned to build a railroad or street railway in the state, and more: brief commission reports, an index of state statutes, and some historical photographs, for example. Perhaps most interesting are the maps—25 of them, using full-color legends redrafted for this edition. They demonstrate the growth of railroads by decade, by system, and by category in a clear, enlightening manner. Midwestern railroad buffs seeking a brief history of and reference book on Minnesota railroads will want to take a look at Prosser's contribution.