

Main Lines: Rebirth of the North American Railroads, 1970–2002, by Richard Saunders Jr. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003. xxi, 436 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95 cloth.

Reviewer William Friedrichs is professor of history at Simpson College. His most recent book is *In for the Long Haul: The Life of John Ruan* (2003). He is working on a new biography of F. M. Hubbell.

Those familiar with railroad history will know the name Richard Saunders from his fine earlier study, *Merging Lines: American Railroads, 1900–1970* (2001). Its sequel, *Main Lines*, takes the story of America's railroads up to the present. The author, who teaches history at Clemson University, clearly loves railroads and knows the territory.

The book opens with a review of the abysmal condition of American railroads in 1970. The Penn Central's bankruptcy that year was symbolic of a troubled industry. By that time, railroads required a huge investment for new track and equipment, but meager profits limited the amount of capital available for maintenance and upgrades. Increasingly poor service led shippers to seek other means of transportation, labor was unwilling to adapt to changing technologies, and regulations prevented railroads from abandoning inefficient routes without approval from the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC).

In the midst of these problems, the federal government came up with several imaginative solutions, ultimately opening the door for a turnaround in the rail industry. The first move created Amtrak, a quasi-public corporation, which took over most of the nation's passenger train service. Passenger service was not a money maker, especially since passenger trains lost the post office mail contract in 1967. Amtrak gave railroads a much needed opportunity to drop passenger service, and most took advantage of it. Shortly thereafter, Conrail, a publicly owned enterprise, took over the lines of five bankrupt northeastern railroads, including the Penn Central. In 1976 Congress passed the Railroad Revitalization and Reform Act (4R) to provide temporary aid to the railroads, determine their long-term needs, and "begin to deregulate the railroads and limit the power of the ICC" (110).

Such efforts, along with the Staggers Act (1980), which furthered the move toward deregulation, granted railroad managers greater leeway in running their companies; they now had more freedom to abandon unprofitable lines, set rates, and merge with other companies. Also important was improving customer service, and here the application of new technologies proved essential. According to Saunders, technology was "at the heart of the railroad's revolution" (206). For railroads to recover, intermodal traffic, or the conveyance of containers or truck trailers on rail cars, was key, and significant advances were

made in this area with huge cranes that could load or unload particular trailers or containers from rail cars and the development of empty-well flatbed cars that allowed for the double-stacking of containers. Computer technology was valuable as well. Since the railroads could now track the goods they carried, high speed, point-to-point shipping service became possible.

Besides examining the roles of politics, economics, and technology in the railroad industry, Saunders also considers the struggles between management and labor. Those difficulties might best be captured in the battle over continued use of cabooses long after computers and electronic sensors had eliminated their purpose.

In the last half of the book, Saunders surveys the industry by region from the 1980s through the 1990s and discusses the dissolution of the ICC, mergers that resulted in several giant roads—the Burlington Northern Santa Fe, the Union Pacific–Southern Pacific, and the combination of Canadian National with the Illinois Central—and the splitting up of Conrail into CSX and the Norfolk Southern.

Although Saunders's story is one of an industry rising triumphantly from death's door, the railroads still face major problems, chief among them the need for capital to expand capacity, and their future success remains in question.

Readers may be distracted by the author's frequent insertion of his strongly held opinions; and the absence of photographs, particularly of some of the new technologies, is noticeable. Nonetheless, for its breadth and its descriptions of specific roads, *Main Lines* is an important book. It should be read by those interested in railroads or transportation history.

Sioux City History, 1980–2002, by Marcia Poole. Virginia Beach, VA: Donning Co., 2003. 304 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.

Reviewer Dennis N. Mihelich is historian and associate archivist at Creighton University. His primary areas of research and publication are African American and urban history, especially the history of Omaha.

Befitting her journalistic background, Marcia Poole has written a readable, episodic, descriptive narrative of recent Sioux City history. The work employs an abundance of photographs to help readers visualize the story and a wealth of sidebars to report on interesting events not necessarily related to her general thesis. All but 11 of her 118 citations come from the archives of her former employer, the *Sioux City Journal*.

Each of her four chapters consists of a series of unfolding news stories, which support her thesis that the era witnessed a major trans-

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