

C. C. Washburn and the Upper Mississippi Valley, by Karel D. Bicha. Garland Studies in Entrepreneurship. New York: Garland Publishing, 1995. xiii, 210 pp. Frontispiece, maps, notes, index. \$55.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY WILLIAM M. FERRARO, ULYSSES S. GRANT ASSOCIATION, SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY AT CARBONDALE

Understanding why some entrepreneurs succeeded and others failed during the nineteenth-century economic expansion of the United States is a fascinating subject. This conventional study of Cadwallader C. Washburn draws on scattered personal and business papers and older secondary works to narrate a story that ends happily despite financial reverses and the personal tragedy of his wife being committed to a mental asylum following the birth of their second daughter. Washburn died wealthy after an active life as a lawyer, land speculator, banker, lumber baron, lead fabricator, politician, soldier, railroad manager, and flour-milling magnate.

Born in 1818 in Maine, Washburn moved to Wisconsin in early adulthood; he spent most of the rest of his life there and in Minnesota. Seven chapters cover Washburn's youth in New England, initial entrepreneurial ventures in land and lead, career as a congressman and governor, military service as a Civil War general, operations in the pinelands of the Lake Superior region, important role in the development of Minneapolis as a flour-milling center, and attempt to leave behind a beneficent legacy in a will that revealed impressive financial assets. Washburn frequently experienced frustration and failure. Portrayed as rather uncongenial, his most valuable business traits seem to have been a blustering personality that apparently overwhelmed people and a brimming self-confidence that enabled him to push ahead relentlessly. Despite miscalculations and occasional ineptness that burdened him with debt and strained his relations with business partners and his several politically and financially influential brothers, Washburn always found people to cover his losses or share new risks. He finally accrued lasting wealth from the large, technologically advanced flour mills that he constructed and maintained at the Falls of St. Anthony's from 1865 until his death in 1882.

Most exasperating, however, is the lack of explanation as to how Washburn conducted his many business affairs. The author makes no attempt to probe the complexities of capital formation in this period or to research mortgage and property records in public archives to reconstruct the networks of loans and obligations among Washburn and his associates. Instead, Bicha shrouds these transactions in mysterious prose: "Washburn responded to the generally depressed conditions of 1856 through 1858 in a typical manner. He bought more

pineland. Needing funds, he merely 'drew' on his own firm, . . . Or he 'drew' on the eastern bankers, Rogers and Woodman of New York, and expected them to cover his drafts" (123). Too often, as well, the stale stereotype of Yankees as shrewd, acquisitive, and taciturn displaces any meaningful effort to analyze the motives behind or context of Washburn's behavior. It is also dubious that sheer luck so often explains Washburn's fortuitous selections of business partners. Washburn clearly enjoyed support from a prominent family and devoted friends and worked incessantly to further his interests through his own labors in legal, political, and business circles. A more thorough investigation of these aspects of his life and career would do him greater justice and provide a better model for studies of other entrepreneurs in Iowa and the Midwest.

Passage to Union: How the Railroads Transformed American Life, 1829-1929, by Sarah H. Gordon. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997. xii, 403 pp. Illustrations, index. \$30.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY H. ROGER GRANT, CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

In *Passage to Union*, Sarah H. Gordon, who teaches at the high school and college level in Connecticut, provides an overview of the impact of the railroad on American life. She covers the first century of rail activity, including the "golden years" from the 1870s through the 1920s. Gordon argues that flanged wheels revolutionized the developing republic. More so than any other transport form, the iron horse put an end to the isolation Americans faced and helped bring about national unity. Often sparked by local interests, railroads rapidly progressed from lines linking "inland" communities to oceans, lakes, rivers, or canals. They emerged as regional, even interregional operations under single corporate banners. Economic progress, too, was another obvious legacy of the rapidly developing rail network following the Civil War. If no railroad arrived in a community, the settlement likely withered and died.

This is a book of mixed quality. Without doubt, Gordon makes valuable contributions to the already expansive literature on railroads. Most of all, she offers good commentary on how railroads directly affected Americans, providing considerable information on travel by train. Gordon skillfully incorporates materials from such varied sources as personal accounts and the records of the American Association of Passenger Traffic Officers. Her explanation of how luggage evolved is splendid; containers that were suitable for travelers who rode stage-coaches, steamboats, and canal packets were usually inappropriate for

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