

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

railroads. For one thing, journeys by sleeping cars altered or modified luggage requirements. Gordon also makes good use of literary sources such as James Fenimore Cooper's *Home as Found* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Celestial Railroad and Other Stories* for her coverage of social history. Similarly, she taps legal cases.

What is troubling about *Passage to Union* is the large number of errors that mar the narrative. This is a manuscript that scholars, particularly ones knowledgeable about railroads, should have carefully reviewed prior to publication. Gordon's credibility is damaged when she inaccurately suggests that the Erie (actually New-York & Erie) Railroad paralleled the Erie Canal (20); that the Illinois Central began building south from Chicago (43); that the Northern Pacific completed its transcontinental line in 1874 rather than 1883 (158); and that the Grangers were politically active in the 1860s rather than the 1870s (192). Some of her generalizations are likewise disturbing. Comments about traveling salesmen, "robber barons," and the narrow-gauge building craze of the 1870s and 1880s are cause for concern; they are either stereotypical or simplistic.

Although there is need for a good one-volume history of the first century of American railroads, *Passage to Union* fails to fit the bill. Works by George Douglas, Albro Martin, and John Stover, while flawed, are more useful. Even though Gordon includes some good social history, much is presented better in other studies. Perhaps she would have been more successful if she had looked at how railroads continued to transform American life. Even though Amtrak service hardly equals what carriers provided prior to the 1960s, the industry exerts an enormous economic impact on Americans of the 1990s. The obituaries of railroads, written by the press in the 1970s, were certainly premature. That is a story that has largely not been told.

The Western Home: A Literary History of Norwegian America, by Orm Øverland. Northfield, Minnesota: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1996. xiv, 442 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$44.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JAMES S. HAMRE, WALDORF COLLEGE

The foreword of *The Western Home* describes the book, whose author has been a professor of American literature at the University of Bergen, Norway, since 1970, as "the first comprehensive scholarly treatment of Norwegian immigrant fiction" (v). A term used throughout the book is *Vesterheimen*, a Norwegian word meaning "the Western Home." The author uses it in two related senses: to designate "the Norwegian-

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