



Twilight Rails: The Final Era of Railroad Building in the Midwest

H. Roger Grant

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By the start of the twentieth century railroads crisscrossed the nation, yet there were still those who believed that the railroad network in the United States was far from complete. Residents of small towns lacking rail access lobbied hard for steam and electric roads to serve their communities, and investors eagerly started new ventures that would fill the gaps in the railway map. While some of these roads enjoyed a degree of success, most of them were financial flops even before the rise of the highway system made them obsolete.

In *Twilight Rails*, H. Roger Grant—one of the leading railroad historians working today—documents the stories of eight Midwestern carriers that appeared at the end of the railroad building craze. When historians have reflected on these “twilight” carriers, they have suggested that they were relevant only as examples of unwise business ventures. Grant finds that even the weakest railroads were important to the communities they served; the arrival of the railroad was cause for great celebration as residents were finally connected to the outside world. A railroad’s construction pumped money into local economies, farmers and manufacturers gained access to better markets, and the excitement generated by a new line often increased land values and inspired expansion of local businesses. Even the least financially successful carriers, Grant argues, managed to significantly improve their local economies.

This thorough and highly accessible history provides a fascinating look at the motivations, accomplishments, and failures of the twilight carriers, granting a new breath of life to this neglected aspect of American railway history.

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