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John W. Barriger III: Railroad Legend

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John W. Barriger III: Railroad Legend, by H. Roger Grant. Railroads Past and Present. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018. xiv, 226 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$45 hardcover.

Reviewer Gregory Schneider is professor of history at Emporia State University. He is the author of *Rock Island Requiem: The Collapse of a Mighty Fine Line* (2013).

H. Roger Grant, one of America's most distinguished railroad historians, has turned his attentive gaze to chronicling the life history and contributions of John W. Barriger III, the prominent railroad executive and government official whose story prominently intersects the twentieth century and its railroad history. In this captivating official biography (sanctioned by his son, Jack Barriger), Grant captures the essence of this railroad leader and his role in shaping American railroad policy and leadership in a troubled time for the railroads.

Barriger was born in St. Louis in 1899. When he was a young boy, his engineer father was murdered by a deranged acquaintance to whom he had loaned money. The young Barriger grew up with the assistance of his mother and her family and excelled in school, attending MIT and majoring in engineering, writing a senior thesis on the history of the Pennsylvania Railroad. He loved railroad history and proved an adept collector of railroad materials and books—the foundation of what later became the John W. Barriger III Research Library housed on the University of Missouri, St. Louis campus.

After short stints at Kuhn, Loeb and the International Carriers unit of Calvin Bullock, where Barriger diligently studied the financial and economic prospects of railroad investments for his clients, he was hired by Frederick Prince, an investor and owner of the Union Stock Yards in Chicago, to prepare a consolidation study of the nation's railroad systems, which Prince wanted to be the basis for the long-delayed and tortuous path towards consolidation that began with the passage of the 1920 Transportation Act. Barriger studied the consolidation proposals and wrote the Prince Plan which favored seven railroad systems. Although it was probably the best of all the consolidation plans, nothing came of the proposal, except that it catapulted the obscure Barriger into national prominence. In 1933 the long-time conservative Republican took a job with the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) Railroad division, studying loans and offering guidance on whether the RFC should fund bankrupt railroads. The government career continued during World War II, when Barriger took a position with the Office of Defense Transportation. He spent the waning years of the war as the federal manager for the troubled Toledo, Peoria and Western, which had nearly shut down due to labor troubles.

Following the war, Barriger worked briefly as president of the Union Stock Yards Railway and as president of diesel engine manufacturer Fairbanks-Morse (based in Beloit, Wisconsin) before becoming president of the Monon Railroad. Long a believer in modernization of plant and equipment, Barriger spent his years at the Monon improving the physical property, streamlining passenger service, and dieselizing the road. Running a railroad gave Barriger the impetus to develop his concept of super railways, which included proposals for limiting curvature, improving efficiency and operations, and ending government regulation. Following his departure from the Monon, Barriger worked for a short time at the troubled New Haven and as a vice-president for the (then) prosperous Rock Island.

In 1956 Barriger began a nine-year tenure as president of the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie, a wealthy coal and steel hauler and a New York Central affiliate. He was recruited to that task by his friend and iconoclast railroad executive Alfred Perlman. Barriger relished the chance to run a profitable railroad, improving the property and turning the line into a symbol of his super railroad.

In 1964 he turned 65, considered the mandatory retirement age for railroad executives, but he was not finished. He was offered the presidency of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas (Katy), a struggling, moribund plains railroad whose prospects seemed dim. He turned that road around. After he cut the deficit for the struggling carrier, he left in 1970, but the Katy lived on until it merged with the Union Pacific in 1982. His final presidency was of the bankrupt Boston and Maine before finishing his railroad career at the Federal Railroad Administration and then again as a traveling sales agent for the bankrupt Rock Island. He died in 1976.

His career was varied, he never retired (or did several times, as Grant explains), and his legacy is a testament to the vision and love of an industry that makes the Barriger name a legend in the field of railroading and railroad history. Grant tells the story of this visionary leader quite well. Readers will find in his biography an extraordinary tale of the travails of twentieth-century railroading through the career of this one man.

A River in the City of Fountains: An Environmental History of Kansas City and the Missouri River, by Amahia Mallea. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018. x, 348 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$50 hardcover, \$29.95 paperback and e-book.

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