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Rails to the North Star: A Minnesota Railroad Atlas

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wide range of entries make it inappropriate to read this as a comprehensive reference on all that is significant to Minnesota. Rather, the project engages the public in history making by starting conversations (or arguments) about what the state's history is, or should be. This is a successful example of history telling as an ongoing debate, open to a variety of interpretations. A project like this would be valuable for any state, to encourage its inhabitants to play a role in telling their own story.

Rails to the North Star: A Minnesota Railroad Atlas, by Richard S. Prosser. The Fesler-Lampert Minnesota Heritage Book Series. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. xiv, 285 pp. Notes, maps, illustrations, bibliography, appendixes, index. \$29.95 paper.

Reviewer Kevin Byrne is professor of history at Gustavus Adolphus College. His areas of interest include railroad, political, and military history and the history of technology.

As railroad historian Don Hofsommer observes in his foreword, *Rails to the North Star* is "a masterful catalog of data" (xii). This reprint of a 1966 book is all of that. Author Richard Prosser referred to the endeavor as "essentially a library-oriented project" that covered "all facets of railroad development" (xiii). Compiled to celebrate a centennial of Minnesota railroad history, the volume met its goals admirably when it first appeared and remains useful today.

Rails to the North Star opens with a 115-page history of Minnesota railroads. Short chapters of ten or fewer pages tell the story chronologically, and other chapters add information on specific themes such as logging railroads and urban lines. The narrative is factual, straightforward, and descriptive, providing essential information, some judgments by its railroad-enthusiast author, and a few digressions. More than half the volume, however, is a compendium of documents derived mainly from Minnesota Railroad & Warehouse Commission records. There are short entries on every railroad company that built or planned to build a railroad or street railway in the state, and more: brief commission reports, an index of state statutes, and some historical photographs, for example. Perhaps most interesting are the maps—25 of them, using full-color legends redrafted for this edition. They demonstrate the growth of railroads by decade, by system, and by category in a clear, enlightening manner. Midwestern railroad buffs seeking a brief history of and reference book on Minnesota railroads will want to take a look at Prosser's contribution.