

Review of *Chicago & North Western In Color, Volume 4: 1965-1995*

Written by Lloyd A. Keyser and Phil Borleske

Morning Sun Books, Inc.; 9 Pheasant Lane, Scotch Plains, NJ 07076

www.morningsunbooks.com

© 2012, hardcover, 128 pages, \$59.95.

Morning Sun Books, Inc. has carved out a niche in the railroad book business by sticking hard and fast to a concept of full-color 128-page books. Over 300 titles have been issued so far at a pace of 20-30 per year.

The Chicago & North Western Railway ("C&NW") has received lavish historical treatment in three prior books published by Morning Sun Books written by Lloyd Keyser with the help or credited co-authorship of Phil Borleske. Those three books covered 1941-1964. This final book covers events from 1965 through the 1995 merger with the Union Pacific, an era of massive changes on the C&NW and the national railroad scene. Those changes included acquisitions of other railroads and lines, employee ownership, culling of the network, deregulation of railroad rates, collapse of other railroads in the C&NW's territory, line sales, and the Powder River coal bonanza in Wyoming. By the time of the inevitable merger with the Union Pacific in 1995, the railroad was profitable and in good condition.

The book is laid out in approximately chronological order. In the prior three books, Mr. Keyser raised the standard for descriptive text in Morning Sun books by writing captions to tell a story that puts the scene into a wider context. This established high standard continues. Each of the approximately 300 sparkling color photos has a miniature history attached in the caption.

Besides the personal collections of the authors, approximately 100 C&NW photographers submitted shots for consideration. The larger sample is evident in the relentlessly high quality and production values of the shots chosen. Shots from everywhere on the system are published in glorious color. A capsule history of the C&NW from 1965-1995 provided context for the shots. A 1965 diesel roster and system maps from 1968 and 1994 provide useful information. Occasionally a complete page is devoted to a topic. Examples of such pages include the acquisition of the Chicago Great Western, the Oelwein shops engine rebuild program, the end of an era for a telegraph operator, and steam engine #1385. There are several more.

Whatever your particular interest is in C&NW operations, you'll find shots and in-depth descriptions in this book. Scenes from far outposts of the system at Lander, Casper, Douglas, and Shobon, WY were unexpected and welcome. I had not viewed a yard scene at Casper until this book. Scenes at Escanaba and Iron Mountain, MI and many other locations in the Upper Peninsula emphasize the importance of the iron ore business for so many years. There were four photos of Tunnel City, WI. The "Alco line" was covered in depth with shots from several of the small towns stretching west from Winona all the way to Pierre. Car ferries, the Lincoln and Winner, NE branches, and the "Ridgerunner line" west of Madison, WI were examples of obscure operations given their due. Several photos show C&NW trains on ex-Chicago Great Western tracks. By 1965, passenger trains on the C&NW were already cut

back, but there were plenty of shots covering operations through the birth of Amtrak in 1971. Commuter operations around Chicago also were covered, showing the transition from the C&NW to Metra in 1976 and beyond.

A particular emphasis in each caption was given to the fate of the engine(s) in the shot. Whether it is useful or helpful to an overview of the C&NW is a matter of preference. It was not my preference. I thought the selection of photos for the Powder River coal business was not as strong as the rest of the book. The 321 mile "Cowboy Line" across Nebraska was represented only by a shot at Long Pine. However, both the Powder River coal business and the Cowboy line were extensively photographed. A book with this highest level of ambition, stuffed full of information, is destined to have a few errors of fact, location, and grammar, but the authors and review team kept the extent of these errors to a minimum.

I feel this is the best of the four Morning Sun books. No library of books about the C&NW is complete without it.

Submitted by Jerry Krug

Notes:

- This book and the prior Morning Sun books are available from the Chicago & North Western Historical Society. See <http://www.cnwhs.org/shopping/> , then select "books."
- Morning Sun also published a two-volume set of books about rolling stock: C&NW Color Guide to Freight & Passenger Equipment which also is available from the CNWHS – same link as above.

Rails to the Rosebud:

The Chicago & North Western Branch Line to Winner S.D.

By Dr. Vernon F. Linnaus with Michael M. Bartels

South Platte Press, P.O. Box 163, David City, NE 68132;
www.southplattepress.com; 2008; 80 pages; softcover; \$19.95

The railroad line from Norfolk, NE to end of track at Wood, SD was built between 1880 and 1929. The line stretched 208 miles northwest of Norfolk to the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. The Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley Railroad built the line starting in 1880 in stages to to Verdigre, NE by 1888, then to Bonesteel, SD in 1902. Further extension of the railroad to Wood, SD by the Chicago & North Western followed one of the final homestead acts in the history of the Federal government. Land was taken from the Reservation by Congress and opened to settlement.

The history of railroad construction and retreat is told in this book. I enjoyed the tales of railroad promoters, sham railroads, and the role of other railroads such as the Milwaukee Road in explaining the railroad destiny of the area. The story of the line abandonment is familiar, including natural disasters, impact of construction of highways, and local efforts to maintain rail service.

The greatest achievement of this book is the depiction of the social and economic environment surrounding this line. This book is an excellent primer on prairie life, settlement in this part of the United States, and on trade and farming under trying weather and soil conditions. Descriptions of how settlers were lured to the area, the legal process involved in obtaining homesteads, and the conduct of local residents and visitors add much interest to the book.

Enthusiasts of the Chicago & North Western will enjoy the narrative of the expansion of rail service onto the unsettled Great Plains. Many crisp black-and-white photos of trains, structures,

and prairie life supplement the atmosphere spun by the text. Helpful maps keep the reader on track. Additional material by Charles Bohl and Michael Bartels flesh out the story of railroading on the line.

Norfolk resident Dr. Linnhaus died in December 2006, having completed a draft of the manuscript, but the book was not yet illustrated and edited. The South Platte Press extended family finished this project. This fine book will keep Dr. Linnhaus's legacy alive for as long as there is interest in the Chicago & North Western and in the history of this area of the Great Plains.

BOOK REVIEW: THE VALENTINE RAILROAD BRIDGE By Jerry Krug

The Valentine Railroad Bridge

By Jerry Penry Bluemound Press, PO Box 150, Milford, NE 68405
<http://www.penryfamily.com/bluemoundpress/valentinebridge.html>
2012, softcover, illustrated, 76 pages.

In 1869, the Sioux City & Western started building north and west at Fremont, NE towards a northern route across Nebraska to reach the Black Hills. By 1882, the line had reached Thacher, Nebraska located 263 railroad miles west of Fremont. West of Thacher, the canyon of the Niobrara River was a substantial obstacle that needed to be bridged to continue the route west.

Construction of the first bridge, built of wood, was finished in 1883. The bridge required much maintenance and the grades of the approaches impeded operations. The Chicago & North Western built a replacement steel bridge on a higher elevation in 1910. Not only is extensive description of the construction methods of the bridges and approaches provided, but vintage photos, drawings, maps, and accounts are used for illustration. Author Jerry Penry, a surveyor by trade, included his own photos taken in recent years to help tell the story of the second bridge.

Readers will enjoy both the narrative and illustrations of the construction of the bridges and surrounding prairie life. In addition, the history of railroad service in the area is provided up to the line's abandonment in 1992. The second bridge is one of the most memorable landmarks and experiences on the current Cowboy Trail, towering 140 feet above the Niobrara River. The bridge is a breathtaking sight from U.S. Highway 20 located to the south.

Students of both C&NW and Nebraska history will find Mr. Penry's book to be a welcome addition to their collections

Union Pacific: The Reconfiguration:

America's Greatest Railroad From 1969 to the Present

By Maury Klein

Oxford University Press Inc., 198 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016; www.oup.com; 2011; hardcover; 508 pages.

Maury Klein previously wrote two books about the history of the Union Pacific titled *Union Pacific: The Birth 1862-1893* published in 1987 and *Union Pacific: Rebirth 1893-1969* published in 1989. It is welcome news that he has written a third volume to bring the Union Pacific story up-to-date.

The author, professor emeritus at the University of Rhode Island, was granted access to the extensive archives kept by the Union Pacific, one of the oldest corporations in the United States. Access to many of the key executives both active and retired was arranged with Union Pacific assistance. Fortunately, the author doesn't flinch when presented with the need to describe negative events and personalities.

The story of the Union Pacific is best told by reference to its place in the national railroad system and by the circumstances of the times. By 1969, heavy Federal and state government regulation on rates, abandonments, and passenger service prevented the industry from reacting quickly to changing times. Many railroads were struggling financially, including the Midwest grangers who moved the Union Pacific's traffic to/from Chicago as well as the eastern railroads. Trucks using the newly-constructed Interstate Highway system were deadly competition for railroads. Compared to most railroads, the Union Pacific was strong and prosperous, but it had its own issues with embracing new technologies and was attempting to shrug off the rigid structure and practices of its past. The corporation also was considering diversification into non-railroad businesses.

The Staggers Act of 1980 revolutionized the railroad business by allowing price competition and streamlining merger and abandonment proceedings. In strong financial position, the executives decided to expand the railroad and strike deals to increase volume. Thus the expansion of the railroad from 9,473 miles in 1969 to 32,616 miles in 2004 was set in motion.

I bought this book expecting to read about key decisions made by the railroad, including abandoning the purchase of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad in 1975; its partnership with the Chicago & North Western in the Powder River basin; the merger with the Missouri Pacific: the acquisitions of the Western Pacific (“paid for from petty cash”) and the Missouri Kansas & Texas, and the more recent mergers with the Chicago & North Western (1995) and Southern Pacific (1996). I was pleased with the coverage of these and other notable events.

But there is much more presented in this book. The intrigue of management approaches and succession throughout the years, the introduction of computers and integration of the merged & acquired railroads, the travails of other businesses under the Union Pacific corporate umbrella, and the specific identification of both capable and struggling executives add interest to the tale. Occasional encounters with the Burlington Northern are described. There is no avoidance of criticism arising from the terrible trials of the Southern Pacific merger in 1997-1998 and the labor shortage in 2004. Examination of the world of North American railroading through the Union Pacific’s view occurs whenever the possibility of yet another merger or acquisition is proposed by the competition.

Chicago & North Western (“C&NW”) enthusiasts might be surprised by the relatively sparse mention of their favorite railroad. The cooperative effort to ship coal from the Powder River basin in Wyoming is described. The author attributes the anticipated coal traffic as the impetus to merge with the Missouri Pacific. The “white knight” role was detailed when the Union Pacific moved to protect its favored Chicago connection when the C&NW faced a hostile takeover bid in 1989. This

role made the merger with the C&NW inevitable. Difficulty in assimilating the former C&NW network is mentioned only briefly. Changes to the former C&NW network and track since the merger scarcely are mentioned.

The index seems incomplete, failing to list several of the references to the C&NW found in the book. There are other omissions in the index too. For example, the reader must already know “Katy” to find the narrative about the acquisition of the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railroad. The lack of a comprehensive index handicaps the use of this book for reference purposes.

Still, readers interested in the current state of railroading in North America will find this book to be an interesting read. Since the author takes time to summarize the state of the railroad industry and the Union Pacific in 1969, there is no need to have read the prior volumes.