dards of deportment in serving elegant consumers at sales counters, but flouted those standards in store elevators as they chatted noisily and jostled the same customers. Aspiring Strawbridge employees could leave their reputable place of business and walk up Eighth Street to vaudeville theaters and the mixed-class and mixed-gender fun they offered. The Peirce Alumni Cyclers peddled through Fairmount Park in emulation of their social betters, while clerks planned illicit rendezvous in the same space for trysts not likely to be condoned by respectable sorts. Bringing these contradictions into conversation with each other might have allowed Bjelopera to affirm that it was clerks’ indeterminate social status that made them important cultural figures whom contemporaries used to gauge the progress of economic and social transformations in this period.

University of Northern Colorado


There is a significant body of scholarship on the commercialization of women’s images and class aspirations in the United States during the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. In Home on the Rails, Amy Richter embraces the premises of these works but adds something important to the literature. Research on railroad history is dominated by institutional works and by cultural histories in which train travel is emblematic of either modernity or the commodification of the American land. Many studies of the public role of women in this era have focused on their participation in the world of mass consumption, via shopping and the display of “style.” Richter has identified a space—the upscale, nineteenth-century railroad parlor car—where all of these phenomena came together.

At the end of the nineteenth century, railroads attempted to gain leisure-travel business by catering to the cultured sensibility of women, by creating an idealized domestic atmosphere with luxurious accommodations and obsequious employees. According to Richter, this strategy had broader implications: “the vision of a homelike public took on growing importance with the emergence of America’s consumer culture—in hotel lobbies, department stores, photographers’ studios, theaters, and even public parks. By the opening decade of the twentieth century, these spaces comprised a hybrid sphere—a social and cultural realm shared by women and men, where deference, privilege, and comfort were determined through commercial rather than personal relationships” (p. 8).

The public-private dichotomy is not the only clash of contradictions explored here; another interesting tension can be seen in the railroad’s twin promises of
exclusivity (luxury, respectability, status) and democracy, the notion that railroad travel was a form of “national space” available to all. Of course its fantasy dimensions were not available to all: as Richter notes, the designation of “colored” trumped that of “ladies” in sorting out the amenities provided to traveling women.

The greatest strength of this book is its diverse primary source material, including: magazine fiction; traveling women’s letters, diaries, and memoirs; sheet music; popular jokes; illustrations; etiquette manuals; railroad promotional materials and advertisements; railroad employees’ rulebooks; conductors’ memoirs; and even legal rulings on railroad travel. Readers may wish that we had some clearer sense of how many real women traveled by train, and which ones, and for what purposes, and at what distances (indeed, one wonders if women’s regular use of public trains and streetcars for short-term travel may have transformed their daily lives more profoundly than a cross-country vacation did), but passenger data has not been preserved to offer answers.

*Home on the Rails* is a fine work of cultural history, broadly conceived and imaginatively researched. It offers a fresh look at familiar subject matter, showing us a world of popular culture and social behavior previously confined to historical footnotes about American women’s lives in this era, and it makes a convincing case that they tell an important story of their own.

Temple University  
CAROLYN KITCH

*Writing the Amish: The Worlds of John A. Hostetler.* Edited by DAVID L. WEAVER-ZERCHER. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005. xviii, 351p. Illustrations, notes, chronology, bibliography, index. $34.95.)

Almost all discussions of Amish history and culture, whether popular or scholarly, begin with the work of John A. Hostetler. *Writing the Amish* consists of four informative and insightful essays on Hostetler’s life and academic career, beginning with one by Hostetler himself, and fourteen selections from Hostetler’s writings. The essays and writings divide the 316 pages of text about equally, followed by a life chronology, comprehensive bibliography (also available in the July 2005 issue of *Mennonite Quarterly Review*), and index. The book brings into focus many facets of Hostetler’s life work and relates them to one another in an effective and compelling survey. Weaver-Zercher’s purpose is to “recount and assess Hostetler’s Amish-related work,” rather than offer a “comprehensive consideration” of all possible biographical and academic components of this life and work (p. xiv).

What emerges is a complex mapping of life experience, theoretical models,