By George W. Hilton. (Berkeley, California: Howell-North Books, 1963. xii, 183 pp. Illustrations. Index. $5.00.)

George W. Hilton is a professor at the University of California at Los Angeles. He is also an excellent writer on transportation subjects and I am sure after reading The Ma & Pa he is a railfan or, as they are called today, a railroad buff. Mr. Hilton says, "In 1949 I had my first academic appointment at the University of Maryland. Although it is entirely untrue that I chose this post for proximity to the Ma and Pa, the fact remains that one of the pleasures of the position was the opportunity to visit the line occasionally." Mr. Hilton is well qualified to write the history of the Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad as he has previously written Cable Railways of Chicago (1954), The Truck System (1960), The Electric Interurban Railways in America (in collaboration with Dr. John F. Due, 1960), The Great Lakes Car Ferries (1962), and The Toledo, Port Clinton and Lakeside Railway.

The author develops the history of the predecessors and related ancestors of the Ma & Pa which numbered three, with a fourth projected but never built. Early activity centered about Peach Bottom on the Susquehanna River in York and Lancaster counties, Pennsylvania. Many of the difficulties through the years of the Ma & Pa go back to construction of narrow gauge railroads in three directions from this area. Baltimore, Maryland, and York, Pennsylvania, are only 49 miles apart, but the Ma & Pa took 77.2 miles of hilly, crooked railroading to get between these points.

Peach Bottom Railway Eastern Division got as far east as Oxford, Pennsylvania, by 1878. After several receiverships it emerged as The Lancaster, Oxford and Southern Railroad and was abandoned by 1919.

The Middle Division, which is the only part that survives today, started out of York, Pennsylvania, in 1874 as The Peach Bottom Railway. It reached its namesake town in 1883.

The southern end of the railroad began as The Baltimore and Delta Railway in 1878. After merger with The Maryland Central Railroad it got to Delta, Pennsylvania (near Peach Bottom), in 1884. Following several more receiverships, final merger of both of these sections into the present Maryland & Pennsylvania Railroad was accomplished early in 1901. In the years 1895 to 1900 the railroad was converted to standard gauge.
The fourth part was projected westward from York, Pennsylvania, across the mountains to the coal fields of Orbisonia, Pennsylvania. This scheme, called the Western Division, was killed by the Panic of 1873.

Chapter 5 entitled “The Glory Years” covers the period from 1901 to 1914. It contains a beautifully worded detailed description of the line of the Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad, starting at Baltimore and continuing through to York, Pennsylvania.

Aside from the pure sketching of the history of the Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad, Mr. Hilton points out that the fortunes of this short railroad rose and fell about the same as those of eastern railroads in general. These quotations from Chapters 6 and 7 illustrate this important thesis:

In Chapter 6 about “The Lean Years,” Hilton says, “One of the most remarkable characteristics of the Ma & Pa is the extent to which its economic fortunes have varied with the eastern railroads as a whole . . . . the railroad’s earnings rose and fell step by step with other eastern railroads. This is all the more remarkable, for the Ma & Pa was mainly dependent upon the slate business rather than on the steel industry, the output of which is the principal determinant of the well-being of the major eastern railroads.” This chapter takes the reader from 1915 through the depression years to the end of World War II.

Chapter 7 on “The Last Years” starts out, “The Ma & Pa was to find out what the post-war era had in store fast. In 1946 the road turned in a deficit of $66,298.04, the biggest in its history. Here was a loss of well over twenty times the deficit of 1932! The Pennsylvania Railroad, which had operated throughout the depression without a deficit, lost money for the first time in its entire history in 1946. Once again the Ma & Pa was going the way of the eastern railroads in general . . . . Much as the deficit of 1946 showed the Pennsylvania the folly of continuing to build new steam locomotives, so did the Ma & Pa the hopelessness of continuing to operate with the old. Neither road had any choice but to dieselize.” Ma & Pa ordered three Diesel locomotives in 1946 and net earnings in 1947 and 1948 reflected the savings. Steam locomotives continued to operate on Ma & Pa until 1956, although passenger service ended in 1954.

In July 1957, the Ma & Pa applied to the I.C.C. to abandon the entire line south of Whiteford, 1.4 miles below Delta. Official abandonment came the following June. Deficits that year and in 1959, coupled with closing of a plant at Red Lion, made the railroad apply
for total abandonment. The petition was denied in 1960. In 1961 traffic improved but the future of the line depends upon proposed new industry.

There is no question that Mr. Hilton has succeeded in dividing the history of the Ma & Pa into the proper periods for consideration and interesting informative reading. This is indicated by this all too brief review and the "meaty" quotations above.

To the person who enjoys delving into railroad history, whether he be a historian studying this period of our American life or a railfan who enjoys such a story dealing with his favorite subject, *The Ma & Pa* is an excellent book. The only criticism might be (and this would not be mine) that the book approaches its subject a little too much from the viewpoint of a railfan. One has to be a devotee to be interested in locomotive drawings, employees' timetables, locomotive rosters, dispatchers' train sheets, etc. Personally, I think they add to the book.

*The Ma & Pa* is one of a profusion of railroad books written in the last five to ten years. It adds something to the collection, however, because it describes the development of a short line railroad and the problems with which it is beset. Furthermore it does this with artistry that holds the reader's attention. This is possible because the Ma & Pa and the territory it serves makes the author's task a work of love.

On a par with the narrative are the illustrations in the book. Mr. Hilton has gone to great length to obtain the best photographs available on the Ma & Pa. They portray the character of the railroad and its locale magnificently. The printing is excellent and the quality of the paper used enhances the photography.

This book is well worth the price of five dollars — particularly if one is a railroad buff or railfan.

Both the author and Howell-North of Berkeley, California, are to be congratulated on a good job well done. Possibly the best tribute to the Ma & Pa is this description found in Chapter 9:

"... a little bit of Colorado railroading set in eastern hills, with slate instead of silver ore, and furniture in place of sheep."

*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*  

William A. James