

East Broad Top. By LEE RAINEY and FRANK KYPER. (San Marino, California: Golden West Books, 1982. Pp. 256. Acknowledgments, foreword, introduction, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$36.95.)

This book is long overdue. The East Broad Top Railroad (EBT) has won considerable fame in recent decades, having been the last narrow-gauge common carrier east of the Mississippi and among the first operating museum railroads in the country. Even early in this century, when the EBT was only one of a myriad of narrow-gauge shortlines in Pennsylvania, it earned a position of distinction in the railway industry far beyond what might be expected of a road operating only fifty-odd route miles in the rural south-central part of the state. The wait for an adequate history of the "Eastie" nevertheless seems to have been worthwhile, for this is a first-rate book in nearly all respects.

Incorporated in 1856, the East Broad Top Railroad did not come to life until 1871. It was built to link the coalfields on the east slope of Broad Top Mountain in Huntingdon County with nearby iron furnaces and to transport both coal and iron to distant markets via a connection with the Pennsylvania Railroad at Mount Union. A gauge of three feet was chosen to reduce construction costs. Contrary to the expectations of their founders, the EBT and its parent, the Rockhill Iron and Coal Company, were only marginally profitable until the early 1900s, at which time the demand for the semibituminous coal of the Broad Top region began to soar. Furthermore, the firebrick industry had just been established at Mount Union, boosting the need not only for coal but also for ganister, a type of quartzite found in abundance along much of the EBT's line.

During World War I, the railroad paid its first dividends since 1877. The end of the war did not bring a decline in business, and by 1926 the East Broad Top was carrying nearly 750,000 tons of coal annually, mostly from the mines of the Rockhill firm. Prosperity enabled the railroad to set itself apart from the traditionally ne'er-do-well narrow-gauge roads of Pennsylvania. The EBT's mainline featured heavy rail and finely manicured stone ballast, for example; and beginning in 1913, the road introduced freight cars of all-steel construction, well before many standard gauge lines made the conversion. The East Broad Top built most of its own rolling stock at its Orbisonia shops.

A series of miners' strikes in the late 1920s marked the beginning of a long downward slide in the railroad's fortunes. During the Great

Depression, the EBT shed expenses wherever possible. In a typical cost-cutting measure, passenger service was virtually eliminated (save for miners' trains) in favor of a new bus line subsidiary. The railroad avoided deficits in the 1930s but was powerless to halt a more serious decline after World War II. More labor disputes, a shrinking market for coal, and a dearth of easily recoverable deposits of that mineral combined to sound the death knell for the EBT. The railroad ceased operations in 1956, and the property was sold to salvage magnate Nick Kovalchick. Encouraged by the local citizenry, Kovalchick chose not to scrap the road. Instead, in 1960 the East Broad Top resumed operations over a portion of its line as a carrier of tourists and other excursionists, a role it fulfills to this day. Authenticity is the watchword, making a visit to the EBT and its shops a journey back in time sixty years or more.

This volume follows the high standards set by Golden West Books' history of another Pennsylvania railroad, the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie, published in 1981. Railroad enthusiasts especially will appreciate the numerous illustrations (over 360), as well as the detailed series of equipment rosters and scale drawings. Perhaps because the book initially took form as Rainey's doctoral dissertation, it is solidly researched and draws upon a wide array of primary source material, including corporate records, government documents, local newspapers, and personal recollections. And—perhaps in spite of its origins as an academic work—it is well written. The narrative offers an astute blend of the technical, human, and business aspects of the EBT and its coal company affiliate.

The price may strike some readers as a little steep, yet it is not out of line for a book of this kind. Indeed, rail fans, transportation scholars, and persons interested in the history of south-central Pennsylvania will find the volume well worth its cost, given the comprehensive and readable text, the excellent photo reproduction, and high production values in general.

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Buffalo, Rochester & Pittsburgh Railway. By PAUL PIERTAK. (North Boston, N.Y.: Privately published, 1979. Pp. v, 239. \$12.95 cloth; \$7.95 paper.)

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