**RAILROADS AND PITTSBURGH** are intimately linked, and this book depicts in strikingly memorable photographs the ribbons of steel that laced and bisected the city. It is a loving tribute to the many people who photographed and collected photographs of the sights that were a part of one of the world’s largest industrial complexes. As the author notes, Port Perry, along the Monongahela River just “over the bluff” from Kennywood Park, was once the point of highest freight density in the world.

Kobus and Consoli pen just the right amount of detail in an easy-reading, historically factual style. Many insightful observations into the composition and effect of the subject railroad are introduced. Their intimate involvement with railroad ing, including membership in the Pennsylvania Railroad Technical and Historical Society, adds pertinence and life to the dry dates and numbers of tracks, miles, and buildings alluded to in this work.

The use of black and white photography is brilliant, as it evokes a feeling of dirt and grime that was a part of everyday life. It signals that the viewer is looking at a bygone era. The smokiness in the air and the layer of soot everywhere tend to blend into a montage that is captured precisely by the black, white, and gray halftones of the medium.

The book is organized around the various railroad companies that eventually were integrated into the PRR system. The railroad development in general followed the banks of the three rivers converging at Pittsburgh’s Point. Crossing these great barriers was a monumental task, and the many bridges cited in this book show the railroad’s triumph over obstacles.

We are first introduced to the evolution of the beautiful Pennsylvania Station in Pittsburgh. Three stations preceded the building that we now see at the foot of Grant Street. It was an important terminal on the railroad that replaced the Main Line of Public Works, Pennsylvania’s answer to competing New York and Baltimore projects to carry goods west. The original Main Line was a series of railroads, canals, inclined planes and tunnels that connected the port of Philadelphia with gateway Pittsburgh. The clumsy transfer of freight between rail cars and canal boats made a through railroad highly desirable. Political maneuvering kept the rival Baltimore and Ohio Railroad at bay and delayed its entry into the city while the Pennsylvania Railroad Company was chartered in 1846. For the next 10 years, the familiar right of way of the Pennsy through the Turtle Creek valley, east to Johnstown, then Harrisburg, was acquired and built. The PRR gained control of the Main Line corridor from Harrisburg to Philadelphia in 1857. The book goes into more detail of this exciting period of growth and expansion of the fledging railroad, but not so much as to bore the casual reader.

The more serious student of railroad history may want to research in more depth each legislative act and industrial move that occurred during these formative years, but the author lets the photos tell most of the story in this book. In a couple of views, the headstrong diesels charge confidently into the future, carrying goods past the mills of industry that once fueled the railroad’s phenomenal growth. In another, the odd juxtaposition of a passenger train slipping under what was once the world’s largest concrete highway span barely hints at the fate of merger and consolidation that awaited it at the end of its run.

Most fascinating is the use of before and after photos of a location many years apart. It’s fun to look for familiar landmarks in the later photo, then check back and see what occupied that space previously. One can begin to get a feel for the vision of the designers of our infrastructure as one notes the carving of roads and tracks into the landscape. In particular, a scene east of the train shed at Pittsburgh reveals that Bigelow Boulevard has become an important four-lane, widened road. The railroad, too, obviously invested heavily by realigning its tracks for more efficient train movement. Equally essential was the new canopy-style train shed itself, affording protection to passengers as well as freight. A church with a remarkably tall spire has given way to a low-slung freight terminal, yet the spindly 17th Street incline remains — at least for a while.

The dates of the pictures jump around quite a bit spanning the past 100 years or so, but most railroad structures exhibit such classic architecture that, except for the automobiles caught in some of the photos, it would be hard for even an avid railfan to guess the decade of the photo, let alone the year. This is part of the fun of looking through this book, as local residents will probably remember being at or near the exact spot of any given photo, and most enthusiasts can identify with railroad scenes in general. Of course, the appearance of a steam locomotive in the picture gives one the pre-1950s feel, and we know that diesels ushered in the real period of post-war industrial boom and optimism that was a volatile mixture of cold-war paranoia and space-age frontier adventurous spirit. The world wars that had fueled the growth of the railroad and provided part of the **raison**
de existence now were gone and so was much of the need to move materials or build defenses. All these factors played upon and against a company that was proud, omnipresent, yet struggling and desperate at the same time to keep up with a rapidly changing economic climate.

This book is much more than just a collection of pictures that could have been taken recently: it is a living history through time of the locomotives, cars, bridges, structures, and track that make up a railroad. The text gives details of the relevance of each item to the overall story. Highlights of the pictures include numerous aerial views, which allow the viewer to relate seemingly disconnected points of the landscape which may be familiar to him in a way that one cannot get from standing on the ground. Very few people are depicted in the photos; the ones that are seem to be merely incidental. The book stands out as a massive tribute to the PRR, as big as the railroad itself, depicting in clear, unadorned black and white glory the gritty guts of a system that played a large part in our lives. Much of the nation’s steel and strength was derived from this region of the country in the last 100 years, and from this work we begin to see how it was formed and how it was held together.

Two maps provide excellent insight into the railroads’ prominence in the Pittsburgh area. The first map depicting freight traffic density gives an idea of where freight was moving through the city and why certain crossings, stations, and interlockings were important to that movement. A large, pull-out map shows the actual trackage of the PRR and many connecting lines, and is detailed enough that one can see individual industrial sidings, passing tracks, and classification yards. The final chapter is a dizzying spin through the last hundred years of the railroads’ evolution, and without the authors’ expert navigation through this collage of names and dates it would be difficult to make any sense of it at all. It is the perfect capsule summary and full of the most important facts that a person could pull out of his head at a cocktail party and come across as knowledgeable. Probably not meant to be a scholarly work, the book has no bibliography or credited references. It is, however, a thoroughly enjoyable read and a quick-paced compilation of facts and photos that chronicles the PRR in Pittsburgh the way many of us would choose to remember it. Truly a work that both the novice and experienced train watcher can appreciate.

Living In The Depot: The Two-Story Railroad Station
by H. Roger Grant.

by Kevin A. Butko

railroads and depots seem to go together; one cannot imagine one without the other. What is less imagined is that a family would live in a depot building. But that is exactly what historian and Clemson professor Grant has found to be the case in thousands of examples — early railroads provided housing for agents and their families right in the depot building. Maybe because I’m from the East, my usual image of a train ‘station’ is a large, grand, imposing commercial structure, first wooden, then later of stone, but here we learn that in much of the country, especially the Midwest, lonely outposts were the norm and provided the only link between the surrounding populace and the rest of the world, via the railroad. The Pennsylvania Railroad, as well as the Western Maryland, is well-represented in this book with numerous photos and references in the text. In fact, on the Gettysburg branch of the WM, an antebellum stone house was pressed into service as a functional, if not elegant, depot. We also find the Erie, Reading, and Lehigh Valley Railroads represented here, employing everything from single-story stone structures to two-story station-houses to huge station hotels.

The book is presented in three sections: the depot and its relationship with the railroad, the depot and its relationship with the agent, and an album of photographs. The black & white photos give the “long ago and far away” feeling that is so important to good reminiscing about the railroad. The author credits collector J. Vander Maas with providing most of the photos; his extensive collection and deep interest in this one specific genre is probably unexcelled.

Early on, Grant makes the distinction between a station and a depot. A station usually includes the site, storage sheds, water tower, and the depot building itself. Yet people did and still do use the terms interchangeably, and early roads took quite some time to define exactly what would become known as the “standard” depot. Each railroad expended effort to standardize designs that could be erected quickly and cheaply, yet were adapted to the particular kind of business that the road was engaged in.

A depot manned around the clock provided assurance that freight or messages would be handled as soon as they came in. This was important before the days of widespread telephone use, or even radios. Communications in the 19th century moved via telegraph wire to only the connected locations — anyone wishing to communicate had to go there to do so. Modern commercial and personal communications devices have completely done away with the need to go to a central location to receive news or messages. Likewise, railroads long ago gave up delivering less than carload lots, and today’s ubiquitous package delivery services make it seem downright absurd that one must leave his home to go “down to the depot” to pick up goods shipped to him. To fully appreciate this book, the reader must put himself in the place of our forefathers and imagine how far away even 30 miles from the nearest town must have seemed.

This scholarly work is well researched and documented. A bibliography and extensive notations on nearly every paragraph ensure that the information can be traced to a publication or other factual reference of the time period. The accounts are lively and full of recollections and anecdotes; however, they sometimes become pedantic in their thoroughness as Grant attempts to find a reference to prove every known variation of a theme. The casual reader can still enjoy this book, as well as the railroad or