

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1986

Review of The CPR West: The Iron Road and the Making of a Nation Edited by Hugh A. Dempsey

Lillian F. Gates

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Gates, Lillian F., "Review of The CPR West: The Iron Road and the Making of a Nation Edited by Hugh A. Dempsey" (1986). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 944.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/944>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The CPR West: The Iron Road and the Making of a Nation. Edited by Hugh A. Dempsey. Toronto, Ontario: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984. Photographs, maps, charts, notes, index. 333 pp. \$24.95.

This volume is a collection of fifteen of the essays presented at a conference organized by the Glenbow Museum of Calgary, Alberta, where there is ample source material on the Canadian Pacific Railway. These essays give us something other than an account of the difficult work of exploring for and constructing the railway and of getting and maintaining financial and political support for it. They tell us how people were affected by the railway, how new communities were created, how the hopes of older ones were destroyed, how

prairie agriculture and new industries like coal and oil were promoted, and how the CPR made Canada known and attractive to wealthy investors and travellers and poor emigrants from the old world.

Patricia Roy's article discusses the necessity of importing Chinese laborers to construct the railway in British Columbia, the causes of the high death rate among them, the inability of most of them to save enough to enable them to return home when the railway contractors and the province were ready to cast them aside as bits of "machinery" no longer needed. But most of her informative article is devoted to the origin and lasting effect of the movement to exclude Chinese immigrants from British Columbia and to provincial disputes with Ottawa on this question.

Hugh A. Dempsey, editor of this volume, has written a sensitive account of how the coming of the railway affected the Indians. They were afraid not so much of the "fire-wagons" as of what the railway would do to their way of life. The game was being frightened away, grass lands set on fire, horses killed on the unfenced right of way, the government was not supplying adequate rations and Indians were hungry. The tribes were losing their land and being relegated to reserves. They felt "an aching loss for the nomadic days that had been taken from them."

Sheilagh Jameson's concise account of the ranching industry stresses its successful establishment in southern Alberta before the coming of the railway, the changes in Dominion land laws that for a time made possible the era of the big ranches, and the role of the railway in providing eastern Canadian rather than transborder American markets for this industry. The CPR met the various complaints of the influential cattlemen's association, but after 1896 the traffic provided by immigrant settlers, who were favored by new land regulations and eagerly sought by the railway, which had land to sell, became more important to the CPR.

There is an excellent chapter on the role of the CPR in urbanizing the West by its devel-

opment of new towns where it located divisional points and railroad facilities. The effect of the railway's policies on several established communities that it ignored in favor of other sites where it could profit from starting *de novo* is noted. The decisive influence of the CPR on the pattern of development within its town sites and its numerous gifts of locations for public institutions are recounted, but the heavy price in the form of long-run tax concessions and restrictions that these new communities had to agree to in return is not overlooked.

John S. Marsh's chapter on the Spiral and Connaught tunnels, which is well illustrated with photographs, maps, and charts, will be of special interest to railroad buffs. The author notes that the possibility of damage to the environment and to the scenery of the area were matters of concern to the government and the CPR when the tunnels were first constructed and are of greater concern to environmentalists now that changes in the route and improvements in the tunnels are soon to be made.

Other topics include the unprofitable Bow River Irrigation Projects, the bitter complaints of British settlers the railway had brought to its prairie lands, the use of motion pictures and landscape paintings, particularly those of John Hammond, to illustrate the scenic wonders and rich farm lands of the Canadian West, and finally the elaborate trains provided for the highly publicized Royal Tours of Canada.

There is no bibliography but there are ample notes to each essay in this interesting, well written, and informative collection.

LILLIAN F. GATES
Ithaca, New York