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Lang, William L., "Review of *The Northern Pacific Railroad and the Selling of the West: A Nineteenth-Century Public Relations Venture* By Sig Mickelson" (1995). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1037.
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The Northern Pacific Railroad and the Selling of the West: A Nineteenth-Century Public Relations Venture. By Sig Mickelson. Sioux Falls, South Dakota: The Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, 1993. Preface, foreword, tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. xix + 232 pp. \$17.95 paper.

The Northern Pacific Railroad (NPRR), as students of railroad history have often explained, was both a railroad construction company and a real estate promoter. In part to finance construction, the NPRR sold acreage to potential settlers from the enormous land grant that Congress had approved in its original charter. For more than three decades, the railroad peddled lands across the northern tier states and territories, and exploited the considerable natural resources of those territories, including timber and other valuable commodities.

The selling of the West to settlers, however, is the story most readers know best. Tales of land deals, the broadcast distribution of promotional flyers in eastern cities and European

countries, and the harvest-filled railroad cars that trumpeted the fertility of NP lands are familiar icons in the story of the railroad's land business. Sig Mickelson's 1940 thesis on the subject focuses on the advertising machinery behind the great promotions. His interest is not in why the lands were sold, nor in where they were located or their promised fertility, but in the methods the NPRR used to push their sales. What he had found is not surprising. The railroad exploited the desire so many western migrants had for free and fertile lands. "The Land Department officials became too enthusiastic at times," Mickelson advises, but adds that the railroad was "probably no more dishonest in its claims than any other large business firm at the time" (p. 99).

Mickelson's research, most of it conducted before the Northern Pacific collection found a home in the Minnesota Historical Society archives, describes the workings of the railroad's land promotion departments, using office memoranda and correspondence with agents. But this is a very dated study. The author should have consulted the work of historians who have gone far beyond this initial foray into the subject. The books and articles of Ross Cotroneo, Carlos Schwantes, and John Hudson come immediately to mind. More troubling, however, is Mickelson's failure to give his research any perspective behind the offices of the Northern Pacific Railroad. The reader will search in vain for discussions of federal land laws or thorough discussion of key players in the NP's promotions. Photographer F. Jay Haynes, for example, is given one line and passenger agent Charles Fee is not mentioned.

More troubling, though, are the author's misconceptions about the territory through which the Northern Pacific built its line. The author's evaluation that in 1870 there was "nothing in Montana east of the Belt Mountains" will surprise Montana historians, but his statement that "Idaho and eastern Washington were almost devoid of population" will dumbfound anyone who knows the history of Walla Walla and Lewiston.

For readers who are curious about the Northern Pacific's land policies, Mickelson's book is a starting point, but there are numerous other, more modern treatments that are thorough and reliable.

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