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**Review of *The Philosophy of Railways: The Transcontinental Railway Idea in British North America* By A. A. den Otter**

Keith L. Bryant Jr.  
*University of Akron*

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*The Philosophy of Railways: The Transcontinental Railway Idea in British North America.* By A. A. den Otter. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. Illustrations, notes, index. xi + 292 pp. \$34.95.

The Canadian Pacific Railway looms large in the history of Canada. As politicians, spokesmen for the British government, the railway's promoters, and business leaders in Toronto and Montreal touted the concept of a transcontinental line from Halifax on the Atlantic to Vancouver on the Pacific, Canadians came to believe that this private enterprise represented the national interest. The railway, its backers contended, would promote a sense of national purpose and unity, provide access to the vast reaches of the western prairies, and ensure the transnational exchange of goods and ideas. A rising sense of nationalism embraced a new technology to unite British North America into the Dominion of Canada. Borrowing nineteenth-century concepts of liberalism from Great Britain and the United States, Canadians idealized individualism and freedom, but as part of their railway credo they demanded state intervention to implement their vision of a new nation united by shining rails from ocean to ocean.

Even as Canadians created a national philosophy of railways, they moved to link their new lines with those in the United States. While publicly arguing for an "all Canadian" route west from Toronto to the burgeoning prairie provinces, they also built lines to the warm water ports of Portland, Maine, and Boston, and extended trackage from lower Canada to Chicago and the upper Midwest. Canadian railway leaders changed the track gauge of their companies to conform with the "standard gauge" of the US to integrate the two systems further. The rhetoricians of Canadian railway promotion ignored the economic realities of the very technology they hoped would forge a new nation.

In his well-written and thoroughly researched study, A. A. den Otter delineates the many contradictions surrounding this national

enterprise. Two significant chapters show that the Maritime Provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, far from being opposed to the Canadian Pacific, embraced the ideology of unity through steel rails. Unlike earlier books on the Canadian Pacific, this volume does not romanticize the epic story of the carrier's construction. Its focus is the creation of a philosophy to sanctify the project. Readers will come to understand the enthusiasm of Canadians to settle the Prairie Provinces in the last half of the nineteenth century.

KEITH L. BRYANT JR.  
Department of History  
University of Akron