

Railroad In The Clouds: The Alaska Railroad In The Age Of Steam, 1914-1945

RAILROAD IN THE CLOUDS: THE ALASKA RAILROAD IN THE AGE OF STEAM, 1914-1945. By William H. Wilson. Boulder, Colorado, Pruett Publishing Company, 1977. Pp. vi + 279. \$25.00.

Reviewed by Donovan L. Hofsommer
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Wayland College

It was called "Seward's Icebox" and "Walrussia" by critics of its purchase, but Alaska was, in the final analysis, a distinct bargain. Discovery of gold there sparked the famous rush of prospectors, who were followed by others seeking to build up the country. This, in turn, prompted various movements to bring railroad service to the region. Numerous private projects were spawned; they were not successful. Nevertheless, the need for continued — and even expanded — rail service persisted. Thus was born the Alaska Railroad. Founded rather reluctantly in 1914, it was to be publicly financed and publicly operated. The last spike was driven in 1923 by President Warren G. Harding. Congress grudgingly voted appropriations to keep the project going through hard times and, in large part because of judicious management, the road finally earned a surplus in 1938. World War II flooded the line with traffic and proved for all time the wisdom of its construction.

The bibliography of work done on the road is short: Fitch's *The Alaska Railroad*; a two-volume pictorial; a Department of Interior publication; and a few articles. Thus, Professor William H. Wilson's book is a welcome addition to the literature. His focus is admittedly limited; he looks at the road only in its first thirty-one years of operation. But he has skillfully combed the company's archives, governmental archives, government documents, and secondary sources for bits and chunks of data pertaining to those years. Wilson's study is also, at least in part, a study of Alaska itself; the fate of the railroad reflected the fate of its trade area.

The book is generally well written although the story never seems to "come to life." Indeed, human warmth is absent. Perhaps this is because of the author's "from top down" interpretation of the road's history. This, of course, does not imply a criticism of Wilson's scholarship or his conclusions. On the other hand, what one can criticize is the unimaginative layout of the book and the regrettable absence of adequate maps.

THE FAMILY, SEX AND MARRIAGE IN ENGLAND 1500-1800. By Lawrence Stone. New York, Harper and Row, 1977. Pp. xxxi + 800. \$30.00.

Reviewed by Stanley L. Engerman
Professor of Economics and History
University of Rochester

The interacting relationships between economic changes in England and the changes in family patterns have long been staples of historical discussions. Some writers emphasize the impact of family forms upon economic development, others the effects of economic change upon family life. It is only in recent years, however, that the increased scholarly

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