

The New York, Susquehanna & Western Railroad. *By Robert E. Mohowski.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. xix + 205 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, \$34.95. ISBN: 0-801-87222-7.

Reviewed by Don L. Hofsommer

In 1957, Northern Pacific's President Robert S. MacFarlane predicted that the nation's railroads would merge into perhaps twenty-five great systems within fifteen to twenty years. In fact, MacFarlane underestimated the industry's merger fever. Today only four great systems are found in the United States, and two more operate in Canada. Swallowed up during the transactions were MacFarlane's own Northern Pacific as well as innumerable other former giants, including New York Central, Atlantic Coast Line, Great Northern, and Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe. Still standing, however incongruously, is New York, Susquehanna & Western (NYS&W)—a David among Goliaths—whose earliest predecessor dates from 1832, nearly the dawn of the steamcar civilization. The road exists today as an important regional short line.

What justifies a book-length study of such a small part of the country's expansive railroad experience? Several factors. The place of short lines and regional roads has not been well documented; this book, as a consequence, represents a case study. Moreover, roads like this one always found it necessary to innovate simply to stay alive, and those innovations often led the industry, with the result that larger companies followed the lead of smaller ones. Indeed, author Robert E. Mohowski presents NYS&W's record as one of determined inventiveness. He skillfully details the company's financial record through several receiverships to its acquisition first by Delaware Otsego in 1980 and then jointly by Norfolk Southern and CSX in 1997. Mohowski also presents an impressive and thoughtful analysis of the road's operations over time. The end result is a compelling and very readable examination of an early railroad enterprise that has survived against all odds.

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