



Laurence J. Malone. *Opening the West: Federal Internal Improvements Before 1860.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998. xvi + 155 pp. \$59.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-313-30671-6.



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In principle, I've got to love this book. Malone finds a little known Congressional report that details federal expenditures on roads, canals, rivers, harbors, aids to navigation, and federal support for state transportation projects. The "Statement of the Appropriations and Expenditures for Public Buildings, Rivers and Harbors, Forts, Arsenals, Armories, and other Public Works from 1789 to 1882, Serial Set 1992," 47th Congress, 1st Session, 1882 is a treasure trove of information. Malone mines it to examine the patterns of federal expenditures for internal improvements. The results are illuminating.

Malone goes after big game: Carter Goodrich. In *Government Promotion of American Canals and Railroads*, Goodrich argues that state governments dominated investment in transportation improvements in the early nineteenth century, investing over \$300 million in railroads and canals. [1] On the basis of Charles Holt's study of nineteenth-century state governments, Malone concludes that state governments only spent \$85 million from 1820 to 1860.[2] Carter Goodrich is the biggest fish in the pond when it comes to early

nineteenth century transportation investment. An error of this magnitude on his part would raise serious questions about our understanding of early nineteenth century development.

Malone develops his theme and evidence in a series of chapters that present and analyze the federal data; look specifically at federal policies in Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Arkansas; and conclude with a detailed study of three counties.

So much for principle, where does this leave us in practice? On page 42, Malone compares federal and state expenditures in several regions of the country. He draws his state data from Holt. The South Atlantic region, which includes Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina in this table, has exactly zero expenditures between 1820 and 1829, zero between 1830 and 1839, and less than \$50,000 between 1840 and 1849, and between 1850 and 1859. The state of Maryland would be surprised to find that its investments in the Chesapeake and Ohio canal and the Baltimore Ohio railroad, which totaled over \$10 million before 1840 did not make it into Malone's calculations. The

state of Virginia would be surprised to learn that its very active Board of Public Works which made substantial investments through this entire period were likewise ignored. Malone's hypothesis is based on the assumption that Holt's data capture all state government activity, when Holt doesn't.

There is a good deal of corollary evidence to suggest that Goodrich's \$300 million figure is in the right ballpark for state investment, with local governments spending another \$125 million. Malone shows that the federal government spent \$54 million on internal improvements, but about \$37 million of this was for coastal and river navigation and harbors. No one has ever disputed that the federal government played an important role in this area. In short, the main thrust of Malone's hypothesis is not supported by the data.

Malone does do a convincing job of demonstrating that the federal government played an important role in making basic road investments in the territorial period in each state. This is an important contribution. However, it tells us little or nothing about the relative importance of federal and state investments, since territories are, by definition, geographic areas without state governments under the direct administration of the federal government. One might have found the argument more convincing if there were some comparisons of federal road construction before statehood and state construction after statehood.

I liked this book and will refer to it as a good source on federal internal improvement spending. Unfortunately, I can't recommend that we accept Malone's revisions of Carter Goodrich.

Notes:

[1]. Carter Goodrich, *Government Promotion of Canals and Railroads, 1860-1890* (New York: 1960).

[2]. Charles Holt, *The Role of State Governments in the Nineteenth Century American Economy, 1820-1902* (New York, 1977).

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