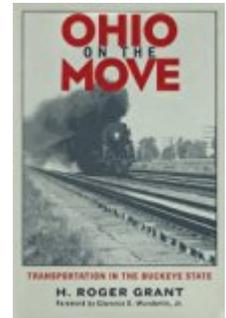


H. Roger Grant. *Ohio on the Move: Transportation in the Buckeye State.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000. xx + 210 pp. \$36.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8214-1283-1.



Reviewed by Kenneth H. Wheeler

Published on H-Ohio (December, 2000)

Transportation in Ohio History

As the bicentennial of Ohio statehood approaches, we can expect many new books that will enrich our understanding of the state's past. *Ohio on the Move: Transportation in the Buckeye State* introduces an Ohio Bicentennial Series published by Ohio University Press. In this inaugural volume of the series, historian H. Roger Grant discusses the ways Ohioans have traveled. The general public and teachers of Ohio history will find the book useful because Grant writes lucidly and with authority on the important subject of transportation.

Grant organizes each of his seven topical chapters around one type of transportation. Thus the book begins with Roads and Highways, and moves through River and Lake, "Ditches" (Canals), Railways, The Electric Way, Urban Transit, and Airways. Some of Grant's stories, especially of canals, Lake Erie, and the Ohio River, will be familiar to anyone well versed in the history of the state. Other topics, however, will be new to many readers. Perhaps the most interesting chapter is Grant's account of the rise and decline of the

electric interurban railroad system that transported many Ohioans from the 1890s to the 1920s, and even as late as the mid-twentieth century. In 1916, at the height of popularity, 2,798 miles of interurban track, a fifth of the national total and far more than any other state, allowed Ohioans to traverse large sections of the state. The interurban lines conveyed small-town and rural people into urban areas, where they shopped and dined. Dairy farmers sent perishable milk swiftly to the cities. These lines also sped city-dwellers into the countryside, where some of them fished or hunted. Interurban company executives, in addition, tried to offer new reasons to ride, and built entertainment resorts outside of cities as a means of increasing ridership and boosting profits. While this influential means of transportation declined with the rise of automobility and better roads in the 1920s and 1930s, the interurban considerably altered patterns of residence, work, and leisure.

On the whole, the book is more informative than interpretive. Readers must often decide for themselves the meanings and implications of what the author presents. Even when Grant is an-

alytical, his interpretation is not always complete. For example, Grant explains that business owners in the small community of Oberlin did not desire an interurban system, out of fear that their customers would shop elsewhere if they had the opportunity. "Although the concerns advanced by these protesters may have been illogical or exaggerated," writes Grant, "they nevertheless felt threatened." Yet on the same page Grant concludes that "Fortunately for shoppers who wished to patronize out-of-town stores, where selections would be greater and prices lower, the electric way came to Oberlin and western Lorain County." (p.120) The effect of this change on the business owners goes unexamined. Similarly, the author only briefly notes how interstate highways spurred suburbanization, or the implications of almost universal automobile ownership on countless small business districts. Throughout, Grant remains focused on the means, rather than the consequences, of conveyance.

Grant commands a wide spectrum of source materials. Students of transportation history will gladly note some obscure materials in Grant's citations and mine his selected bibliography. Readers will also enjoy the dozens of illustrations, many from the author's personal collection, carefully presented on appropriate pages. From maps of canal and railroad routes, to photographs of motor buses and postcards of airport terminals, Grant uses his resources effectively. Still, while the decision to organize the material topically gives each chapter a clear focus, the reader learns about the interstate highway system in the first chapter, one hundred pages before the demise of the trolley car. Ultimately, this textbook of sorts lacks a thesis, an introduction, and a conclusion. Grant does not explain how the book differs from what other historians have written on the subject, nor explain how the history of transportation in Ohio fits into broader regional, national, or international developments in transportation. Despite these concerns, Grant has written a comprehensive account of transportation developments that

have fundamentally shaped the lives of Ohioans. *Ohio on the Move* is a handy reference work for teachers, and an interesting overview for general readers of Ohio history.

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Citation: Kenneth H. Wheeler. Review of Grant, H. Roger. *Ohio on the Move: Transportation in the Buckeye State*. H-Ohio, H-Net Reviews. December, 2000.

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