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The Texas Railroad: The Scandalous and Violent History of the International and Great Northern Railroad, 1866-1925

Wayne Cline

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The pioneer Union Pacific Railroad, a 1,085 mile-long segment of the nation's first transcontinental railway, is rightfully celebrated as a vital icon in American history. Yet, an equally long line that played a premier role in the development of the southwestern United States and established the country's first rail connection with Mexico is no less important. Unlike the famous Union Pacific, this railroad has been forgotten – until now. Formed shortly after the Civil War, the International and Great Northern Railroad ran almost border to border across Texas and ultimately served most of the state's population centers, including the great cities of Austin, Fort Worth, Laredo, Houston, San Antonio and Waco. With such a strategic and far-reaching franchise, the I&GN was proudly called "The Texas Railroad." This book brings to life the engaging saga of "The Texas Railroad," and recounts the hopes and dreams of its founders, the treachery and greed of its usurpers, the heart-wrenching emotions of its immigrant patrons, the longsuffering grit of its employees, and the heroism of its defenders. Started by Texans who hoped to build the longest railroad in the world, the International and Great Northern Railroad fell under the sway of a group of Wall Street bankers who drove the company into bankruptcy and expropriated the road's five million acre land grant. The beleaguered road was then victimized by the most notorious robber baron of the day, Jay Gould. In 1881 Jay Gould made the I&GN part of his great Southwestern system of railroads. Aided by former Union Pacific operatives who had defrauded the Union Pacific through a construction company called Credit Mobilier, Gould used a similar scheme to lay hundreds of miles of overpriced and shoddy track on the Texas & Pacific and Katy Railroads, as well as the I&GN and other lines of his Southwestern system. When Gould's Credit Mobilier syndicates were finished, their construction agencies had made millions at the expense of these roads, leaving them all in bankruptcy. Meanwhile, Gould used the T&P, Katy and I&GN as feeders for his principal holding, the Missouri Pacific Railroad. In order to squeeze maximum profits from these feeders, Gould cut maintenance expenses to the bone, thus rendering the lines dangerous to operate. This brought Jay Gould into an epic conflict with Texas Attorney General Jim Hogg. Publicly, Hogg vowed to take the I&GN away from Gould, but privately he helped Gould to stay in power by enjoining the Katy Railroad from getting control of the I&GN. Ultimately, Jim Hogg exploited the I&GN to become the governor of Texas. Despite these legendary scandals, the I&GN served as an avenue for the great migration into Texas after the Civil War, as hundreds of thousands of desperate farmers gave up their homes in the devastated Deep South and headed to the Lone Star State. Thereafter, the I&GN continued to aid in the development of Texas, the southwest, and Mexico. When continuous standard gauge track finally linked the United States with Mexico City, the I&GN inaugurated some of the most glamorous international passenger trains of the steam age, including the famous Sunshine Special. But scandal and violence stalked the I&GN throughout its history. In 1886 the road was caught up in the Great Southwest Strike. The I&GN then suffered a long series of train robberies, followed by the dangers of the Mexican Revolution. In 1900 the I&GN and one of its subsidiaries were rocked by the deadliest hurricane in American history. All these troubles were overcome by loyal employees, resourceful lawmen, and resilient patrons who persevered to make the tracks of "The Texas Railroad" a vital Texas asset that remains in use today. Using dozens of vintage pictures and maps, their dynamic story is told here with enough comprehensive detail to prove that the I&GN was one of the most important railroads in American history.

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