



The Railroads Of King of Prussia, PA: The Past Leads To The Future

Michael Stefan Shaw

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Behind the Book

Today, as King of Prussia celebrates its 300th year of existence, there is a strong movement to bring back passenger rail service to King of Prussia in order to serve the business and residential communities. "The Railroads Of King of Prussia, PA: The Past Leads To The Future" looks at the rich 175 year history of the railroads in King of Prussia. In doing so the author makes the determination that the present day demand for renewed passenger rail service is a microcosm of King of Prussia as it has traveled the path from a rural township to a business dominated suburb of Philadelphia.

The Railroads Of King of Prussia, PA: The Past Leads To The Future Details

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From Reader Review The Railroads Of King of Prussia, PA: The Past Leads To The Future for online ebook

Robin Friedman says

The study of history includes not only learning about large scale national or international events of the past. Good historical work often is local in character. An example of a local history is this new book, "The Railroads of King of Prussia, PA: the Past Leads to the Future" (2013) by a local historian, Michael S. Shaw. Published by the King of Prussia Historical Society, the book commemorates the Tricentennial of Upper Merion Township, founded in 1713. The book also celebrates the 175th anniversary of the first railroad entering the township in 1838. Shaw became interested in railroading history when he found some hidden, abandoned tracks in King of Prussia. He became curious and wanted to explore their history with this book as the result. The author kindly sent me a copy of this book to read and review.

It is important to pinpoint King of Prussia and Upper Merion for readers who may be unfamiliar. Upper Merion is a township in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania about 20 miles northwest of Philadelphia. King of Prussia is a census-designated community in Upper Merion Township. It is unincorporated and has no formal borders or governmental structure but has been expanding its reach with industry and people. The community is best known for its famous old inn, the King of Prussia Inn, which has been moved from its original location but which still stands as a National Historic Landmark. As Shaw explains, King of Prussia was a rural, sparsely populated area for most of its history. Beginning in the early 1950s, the area experienced expansion and rapid growth with the building of expressways and the coming of industrialization. In 1965, the largest mall in the United States, the King of Prussia Mall, opened in the community. Today the community is a heavily populated, prosperous suburb of Philadelphia. As do many suburban communities, it has a large traffic problem.

Shaw discusses the history of King of Prussia through its railroads which reached the community by 1838. He relates the railroad history to the earlier transportation history of the region, involving the building of canals, to its changing economic character, and to its people. Railroads are a relatively small presence in today's King of Prussia. The book shows how they rails once predominated in the area and were instrumental in its development.

Much of the book tells the story of two large former major railroads that served the area, the Reading Railroad and the Pennsylvania Railroad, and competed for its development. Both roads ultimately went bankrupt with their properties assumed by other carriers. As Shaw tells it, King of Prussia became active in its capacity as a carrier for coal from further north in Pennsylvania to Philadelphia. It developed a large freight yard, the Abrams Yard, which is still in use. Railroads also carried the limestone and iron mined in areas adjacent to King of Prussia. Many subsidiary lines developed over the years to service industrial growth at various points. Railroad traffic peaked in the late 1920s and then went into gradual decline with the development of the highway system.

Shaw is particularly interested in passenger railroading. He shows that King of Prussia offered active passenger service up to about 1900 which continued in reduced form through the 1920s. Philadelphia was the hub, but service also took place between small local communities. With the increased density of King of Prussia and the attendant traffic congestion, Shaw argues that passenger rail service should be restored to King of Prussia. Steps leading towards this goal are apparently under way.

Shaw has done an able job in finding information and in telling a story which otherwise might be lost. The

book includes many old maps, photographs, timetables, railroad guides, engines, stations, bridges, and other memorabilia documenting his story of railroading. It also includes color photographs, many taken by the author, documenting the continued presence of the rails. With persistence, Shaw took photographs of old abandoned lines in the area, sometimes covered over with vegetation and hard to see, and followed his story.

Shaw recounts a valuable story about a small American community and its railroads which has since burgeoned into a large suburb. The book is a fitting gift to a community celebrating its 300th anniversary and reflecting on its past and its future. The book will have strongest appeal to a regional audience and will also be of interest to railfans.

Robin Friedman

Jim says

I was a railroad kid in the 1940s and 1950s. My dad worked all his life for the Georgia Railroad, and our family traveled for free on passenger trains all over the Southeastern US. By the end of the 1950s, rail passenger services were dying out as highways and commercial air travel became the favored travel modes for Americans. But to this day, I've remained a bit of a railroad buff, so when author Michael Shaw asked if I would review his book, I was glad to accept.

It's a marvelous book, telling the story of the rise of King of Prussia and the major role that the railroads played in the city's development. In the 1830s and 1840s, the recently invented steam locomotive led to an explosion of railroad services in King of Prussia and elsewhere in the eastern part of the country. The railroads were invaluable for transporting the town's mining products (limestone and iron ore) to where they were needed. Passenger services soon followed, and the town grew rapidly into a regional center of industry and commerce.

The book is a treasure trove of information not only for railroad buffs, but for anyone interested in the history of King of Prussia and, in a broader sense, the United States, since the railroads had a huge impact everywhere they were built. I spent hours perusing the book's old maps, railroad timetables, newspaper clippings, correspondence, historic photographs showing the railroads in their heyday, and modern photographs showing some of the old abandoned roadbeds, sidings, and overpasses. It's not just a cut-and-dried history, either. There are plenty of personal stories and anecdotes that add a human touch to the history.

Kudos to Michael Shaw for such a fascinating and memorable look into the past.

A review copy of the book was provided by the author.

Melissa says

Choo! Choo! And other such train noises. While I am by no means a railroad enthusiast (I just think the trains look pretty) I have to say that this was an informative book. Focusing on the railroads in the Kind of Prussia area of Pennsylvania, it meandered through local lore and the railroad industry.

This is non-fiction and it tells the history of the Upper Merion Township and King of Prussia railroads. It

starts with the history of the area and how the towns were first settled. Then it moves into the trade and industry and why the railroads were brought in. The next few chapters show the evolution of transportation in the area and separates the different lines (Chester Valley Railroad, North Abrams Industrial Track, etc.) into their own chapters telling their own histories. Chapter 10 has Railroad Testimonials from locals and Chapter 11 gives the history of some of the accidents on the railroads. Finally, the last few chapters show the future of the railroad and the abandoned railways that are left in the area.

This book is probably going to have a very narrow scope of readers. Those who will read it in full will be history buffs, railroad enthusiasts and people local to the area. The next circle of readers will be the hobbyists, or those who enjoy going to museums and reading the captions under every picture. And finally the last circle will be those people who just like flipping through the pictures and care nothing about the text at all. Because the text is text-book format. It gives the facts and really the only personable tone to the writing was the testimonials (which was actually my favorite section). The text also focused more on the area than trains in general, so be prepared to read a book about King of Prussia's tracks, not the industry as a whole or the mechanical workings of trains (but really the title tells you that is what this book will be about). Really though, I'm probably located in that last circle who likes to gush over the pictures. I enjoyed seeing the tracks through time, the diagrams, the people at the railway stations, and the old advertisements. I flipped through the book a couple of times just to go through the pictures.

An interesting book and worth reading just to glance through all the pictures. If you are obsessed with railroads and time tables or the King of Prussia area, I'm sure this is something that you would definitely want to read. If you're not so obsessed with those things, well, it may be a hit or miss with you.

****This book was received as a Free Advanced Reader's Copy****

The Railroads of King of Prussia, PA
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185 pages

Review by M. Reynard 2014

More of my reviews can be found at www.ifithaswords.blogspot.com

Tanya says

Well written. Very interesting - will be passing it on to my husband to read. Moved to PA 5 years ago and I love books like this that can give me more information about the PA area.

M.M. Strawberry Reviews says

I was impressed by this book. I am not a train enthusiast, nor am I (or was I ever) a resident of anywhere in Pennsylvania, let alone Kings of Prussia.

However, I was duly impressed by this book. It is clear that the author put a lot of thought and research into this, and I applaud him. Not only do you have a lot of history, you also have a great amount of supplemental

materials - photographs (black and white) maps, manifests, receipts, advertisements, tickets, and so on, so this is not merely a dry historical text of railroads in Pennsylvania.

The author splits up his material in coherent chapters, so the history is easy to follow. There are also letters, which is pretty cool. The author's dedication to this is matched only by the conciseness and organization of information in here, which makes it a definitely memorable book. The target audience may be more limited than the audience for a standard novel, but for those who this book is intended for, as well as anyone curious enough to check it out, you will not be disappointed!

Lisa Kearns says

Michael Shaw and Alex Tsioulfaidis spent a year photographing, researching and compiling this comprehensive book about the history and impact of the railroads on a small Pennsylvania town. While railroad fans will obviously get the most enjoyment out of the book, anyone who likes American history will also enjoy it. And certainly anyone who lives in the King of Prussia area will be very happy to see their town immortalized in such a detailed, respectful way.

I was amazed by the sheer number of old photos, town plats, old tickets and train schedules, railroad stock certificates, newspaper clippings and legal documents included in this book. As someone who does research for a living, I was in awe of the number of hours it must have taken to find these antiques on microfiche, dusty library shelves and the Internet. I spent more time poring over the old photos than anything else, and I enjoyed seeing the current photos of the same locations.

Mr. Shaw mentioned that King of Prussia/Upper Merion Township is celebrating its 300th birthday, and this book is the perfect way to celebrate. Well done!

I received a complimentary copy of The Railroads of King of Prussia, PA in exchange for writing an honest review.

Tony Parsons says

Dr. Zhivago my favorite movie, & how the trains endured the Russian winters as did PPL & their open buggies...I would luv 2 win/read this book

Darcia Helle says

I have to admit this is not a book I would have picked up on my own. I'm not a big fan of railroads and I knew next to nothing about King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. But the author sent me an especially nice request for an honest review and I like history, so I agreed to give the book a try. I'm glad I did.

First, the book is put together exceptionally well. There are numerous photographs, both color and black and white, as well as images of various documents. The chapters are well organized, making the book easy to navigate and the history easy to follow. The research is impeccable.

Shaw's writing is that wonderful combination of professional and entertaining. This is often a difficult balance for nonfiction authors to achieve. Shaw handles his subject well, giving us the facts while instilling his love for the topic.

This book is about more than railroads. We get a look at the early culture of Pennsylvania and an understanding of the time period during which railroads came alive. I think this is a book that will appeal to those who love trains, as well as those who enjoy history and/or live in Pennsylvania.

Amie's Book Reviews says

I received a free copy of this book through the Goodreads First Reads program. In exchange I am offering up this honest review.

This book was written by Michael Stefan Shaw for the 300th Birthday of Upper Merion Township in Pennsylvania.

The book tells the story in vivid detail of the history of King of Prussia's railroads.

What could have been a dry and boring subject is instead brought to life through historic details, stories from people who live(d) there and pictures of how each railroad appears today.

This book will appeal to those who live in or near King of Prussia, PA. It will also appeal to railroad and train enthusiasts. The biggest surprise is that it will also appeal to many others.

I grew up in a small town in Ontario, Canada with a railroad right behind my house and even though there are a lot of miles between PA and my hometown, this book brought me back to memories of growing up. Perhaps it is the small town similarity, perhaps it is the similarity of growing up close to rail lines, who knows? But, I thoroughly enjoyed this book.

It is obvious that Michael Shaw has put a lot of time, thought and effort into this book and I rate this book as 5 out of 5 stars. ?????

Interesting and informative! Why not give this book a chance?
