

THE BOOK SHELF

BOOK REVIEWS

Nevada's Teamsters, Truckers and Truck Stops: A Chronicle

By Jerry Aaron

Sparks, Nev.: Jerry Aaron, 2015

Jerry Aaron's new book, *Nevada's Teamsters, Truckers and Truck Stops*, is a first-rate chronicle of the people and companies that have built trucking in Nevada. Jerry's conversational style and passion for both the trucking industry and Nevada are evident. If you are a truck driver, or have an interest in Nevada history, Nevada's Teamsters, Truckers and Truck Stops is an enjoyable and easy read.

Jerry tells the story of the trucking industry from a Nevada perspective. Growing up in rural Nevada, along Interstate 80, I am familiar with many of the companies and truck stops, in his book. As a kid I saw many trucks traveling the roads, from Wells Cargo trucks, each with its red derby (which I called a cowboy hat) on the side, to Pacific Intermountain Express's trailers, with "P.I.E." emblazoned on them, that I imagined were filled with deserts.

Jerry lays out the story of Nevada's trucking industry, both past and present. Starting with the teamsters who ran mule trains that served communities such as Tonopah and Goldfield, Jerry shows how they progressed into drivers who operated trucks equipped with solid tires and manual transmissions, and then into participants in the trucking industry we know today.

The book is versatile in the sense that it can be read cover to cover or you can start it in the middle. Each chapter is strong enough on its own to give you a complete view of a particular company, or of something like the sometimes harrowing experience of "Running 'The Hill'," as locals call Donner Pass.

Jerry does a noble job describing the role that government has played in the development and operation of the trucking industry. The regulation of the industry by the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) and the increased power of the International Brotherhood

of Teamsters all play a huge part in how the trucking industry evolved, not just in Nevada, but across the United States. Jerry takes a real-world approach in demonstrating how a "gypo" or gypsy trucker, without ICC authority, was the bane of legitimate operators.

The trucking industry touches every sector of the economy, and Jerry provides a look at not just the trucks but the cargo that drives Nevada's economic engine. From our earliest industries of agriculture and mining to today's warehousing, with its distribution centers that serve some of the biggest corporations, Jerry puts the pieces of his story together in a way that shows the trucking industry's essentiality to the economy.

Jerry longingly describes a past era in which truckers were considered the "knights of the road." It was an era when a trucker would live by "the driver's code," always stopping to help a stranded trucker or motorist. In a time before CB radios, truckers would use hand signals and flashing headlights to warn others of hazards that lay ahead.

There is a symbiotic relationship between truckers and truck stops. Truck stops are oases for weary truckers, where they can find enough room to park their rigs, hit the head, and grab a meal. Jerry aptly documents these businesses, such as Bill and Effie's, Slim Olsen's, and The Truck Inn, that dotted Nevada's roadsides and served truckers from all over.

The most compelling part of Jerry's book is his look at the trucking companies and the people who ran and worked for them. The companies that Jerry writes about vary greatly. They are companies Jerry either observed on the highway for many years or, in some cases, had a professional relationship with. Some of these companies have long histories, such as Packer Transportation, that was started by Ben Packer in the late 1940's and is still being run by his son Guy and granddaughter Shelly, while others, like its Logistics, have only existed in this century.

The story of Dale McLeod and McLeod Trucking Service is one of my favorites. Dale was born in Mina, Nevada, in 1907 and contracted polio at age two, which resulted in the loss of the use of his legs. The ingenuity and grit employed by Dale to overcome his disability and run a successful trucking company is moving.

The pictures that Jerry uses in telling his story are both illustrative and beautiful. Some, such as those of