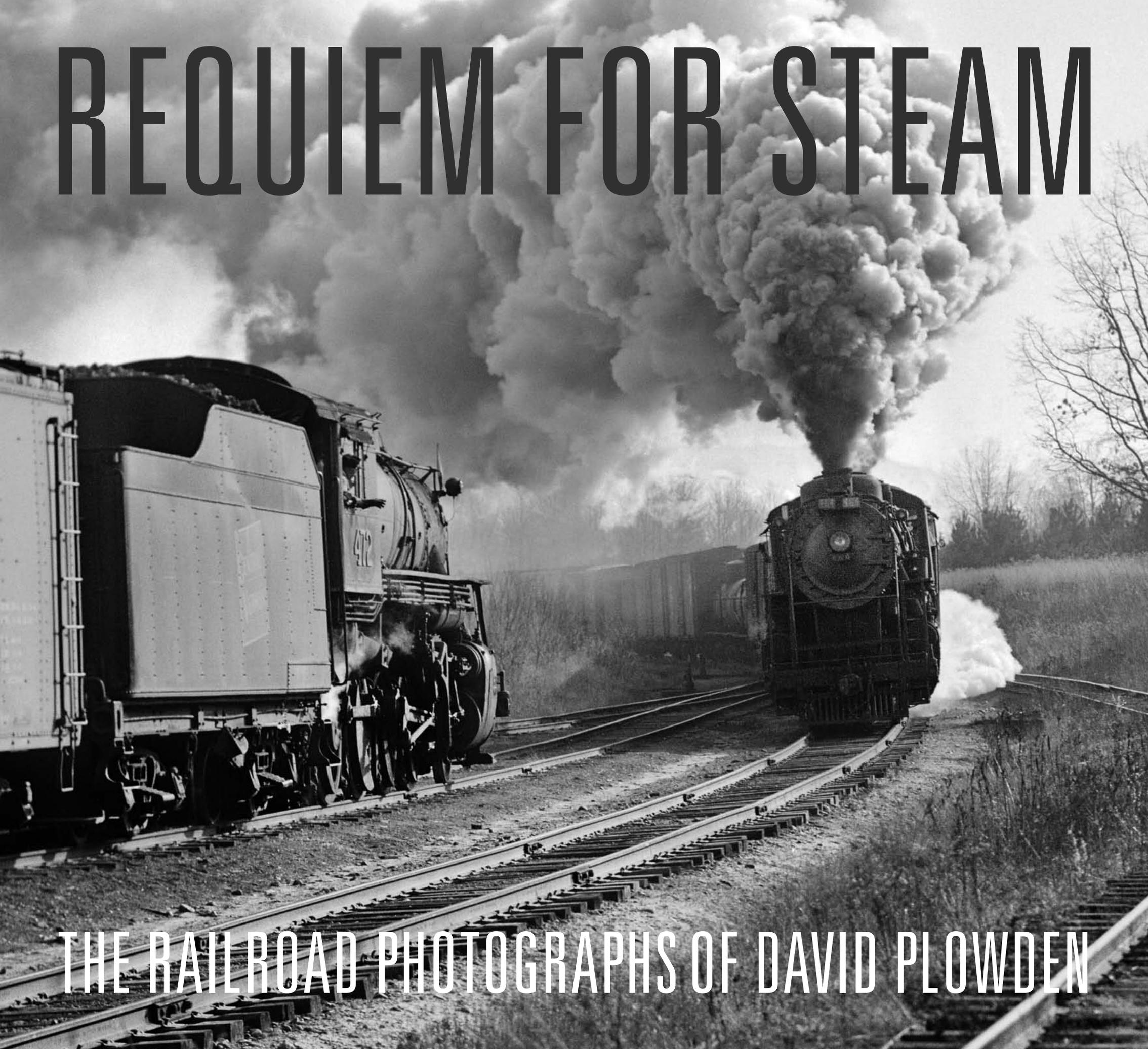


REQUIEM FOR STEAM



THE RAILROAD PHOTOGRAPHS OF DAVID PLOWDEN



FRONT COVER: CENTRAL VERMONT RAILWAY, "EXTRA 464 NORTH" AND "EXTRA 472 SOUTH," AT AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS, 1954.

ABOVE: CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY LOCOMOTIVE NUMBER 5107. MÉGANTIC, QUEBEC. MARCH 29, 1960.

REQUIEM FOR STEAM

I never understood why Minor White, one of the most influential photographers of the twentieth century, accepted me as a student in one of his workshops. The portfolio I presented to him consisted of twenty badly printed pictures of steam engines. He looked at them once slowly without saying a word, then for a second time even more slowly. After he had finished he remained silent for what seemed an eternity before turning and saying, “You have the eye of a poet.”

So began six of the most difficult—and valuable—months of my life. Minor was an exacting taskmaster, a perfectionist. He encouraged us to gain complete mastery of technique by using the Zone System, a method that was developed by Ansel Adams that gave the photographer precise control over his material. He drilled us relentlessly so that we would learn our technique well enough to put it in our back pockets in case we should ever need it. Once there, he said, we could concentrate on the business of making photographs.

He was unquestionably one of the greatest printers who ever lived. He said he couldn’t teach us how to print but to come and stand next to him in the darkroom, watch his technique. I did and it proved to be a priceless experience. One of the most important things I remember was Minor’s definition of a photographer as being someone who “must have his feet on the ground and his head in the clouds.” Abstract art “separates the sheep from the goats” was one of Minor’s favorite aphorisms, one he never let us forget. Frankly I was never sure who were the sheep and who were the goats, but I knew that whichever they were I was the other.

Minor’s approach to photography and mine proved to be antithetical and soon I found that the pallid aestheticism of the workshop began to stifle me. I yearned for the smell of coal smoke, of hot, dripping grease, of steam and the sweat of the roundhouse and so I decided to leave one night in the middle of a blizzard. My cohorts implored me to stay, saying that I was on the threshold of an epiphany.

Minor wrung his hands despairingly, saying that he had taught me nothing. I assured him he had, which was the truth. He said in parting that all my photographs reflected a feeling of loss. The loss of the steam engine, he surmised. He was right. “Go do your damned engines,” he said in frustration “Get them out of your system, or you’ll never do anything else.”

To this day, long after steam locomotives have vanished they are still very much in my system. From the time I can remember the railroad has been my leitmotif, the reoccurring theme that appears in one guise or another in so much of my work. Ever since I was a little boy I have spent as much time riding trains as possible. I sought out as many different railroads and trains as I could find, never taking the same route twice if there was an alternative. After a lifetime of riding the rails I have traveled many hundreds of thousands of miles across the length and breadth of the North American continent, from Newfoundland to the Pacific. During all those journeys the railroad became my tutor and the train window was the lens through which I formed my perception of America. No matter where I was going somehow I always found my way to the tracks and so long as there was a train going my way I was on it.

What a wondrous thing this steam engine was. I confess I would never have picked up the camera had it not been for the locomotive. The very first picture I ever made was of a steam engine taken with my mother’s little red box Brownie. I was eleven. For fifteen years thereafter I used the camera solely to photograph locomotives and trains. Even when I bought my first “serious” camera, a Crown Graphic, in 1952 I used it only to photograph trains.

I have never been able to fully explain why the locomotive was so compelling to me. Perhaps it is as simple as the fact that the formative period of my life coincided with the twilight of steam and like many a boy I was overcome by the spell of the locomotive. Wherever it appeared it commanded full attention. It was dangerous, magnificent, terrifying, exciting, loud, immense, and powerful all once. No one could tell me that this wasn’t the most compelling machine ever devised!

There was nothing covert about a steam engine, nothing hidden from the eye. When at rest it was possible for anyone standing beside it to marvel at this most extraordinary of mechanisms. The system of rods and cranks, valve gears and pistons organized with sublime precision and logic, which took steam and turned it into motion, was laid out as plainly as a blueprint for all to see. In that way it was like a bridge—one does not have to be a structural engineer to understand the accomplishment. Moreover, this example of man’s ingeniousness was available for all to



CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY, ENGINE TERMINAL MÉGANTIC, QUEBEC, MARCH 29, 1960.

CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY, ST. LUC FREIGHT YARDS, MONTREAL, QUEBEC, 1960.





BOB THOMBS, ENGINEER, CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY, BROWNVILLE DIVISION, MAINE, 1959.

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS, LOCOMOTIVE NUMBER 6218, WHITE RIVER JUNCTION, VERMONT, 1965.





Extended Captions



1 Central Vermont Railway manifest freight train Number 491 running as Extra 464 North meets Extra 472 South at Amherst, Massachusetts, in April 1954. Extra 464 is actually double-headed. The second locomotive is obscured in the photograph. All three engines were class N-5-a 2-8-0s.



2 Canadian Pacific Railway locomotive Number 5107 at Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, on the morning of March 29, 1960, before departing for Brownville Junction, Maine, on train number 518, the Scoot. Number 5107 was a 2-8-2 type originally built by the Canadian Pacific's Angus Shops, Montreal, Quebec (CPR), as a class P-1a in 1912. It was rebuilt at the same Angus Shops, ca. 1926, reclassified as a P-1d and renumbered 5107. Mégantic, Quebec, March 29, 1960.



3 Canadian Pacific Railway locomotive Number 5107 and Number 3514, an M-4g-class 2-8-0 built by the Baldwin Locomotive Works (BLW) in 1907. Because the regular diesel switch engine was on snowplow duty, Number 3514 was the switch engine working the freight yards in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, on March 29, 1960.



4 Canadian Pacific Railway locomotive Number 5145 on the Hochelaga turn, photographed in March 1960 at the St. Luc freight yards, Montreal.



5 Bob Thombs, engineer, in cab of Canadian Pacific Railway locomotive Number 5137 on train number 517, the Scoot, between Brownville Junction, Maine, and Mégantic, Quebec. The Montreal Locomotive Works built number 5137 as

class P-1b 2-8-2 in 1913. It was rebuilt as a P-1e class, ca. 1926, at the Canadian Pacific's Angus Shops in Montréal. Photograph made July 23, 1959.



6 Canadian National Railway 4-8-4, class U-2g locomotive Number 6218 at White River Junction, Vermont, photographed in July 1965. The 6218 was built in September 1942 by the Montreal Locomotive Works. The CNR had a total of 160 4-8-4s in eleven classes, more than any other railroad. The Canadian Locomotive Company delivered the first, Number 6100, in 1927. It was given the name "Confederation" to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Canadian Confederation. Thereafter all Canadian 4-8-4s—generally called the Northern type by most railroads—were known as Confederations. The last, Number 6264, was delivered in 1944.

It seems that the CNR kept steam locomotives on its roster for use on special excursions after the system was officially dieselized on April 25, 1960. Late in 1964, when the last of these engines, number 6167, came due for repairs, the 6218 was made ready to take over its duties at the CNR's Stratford, Ontario, shops. The 6218 made several excursions in Canada and, after being certified by the ICC, in the United States as well. One of these was the special excursion from St. Albans to White River Junction and return in July 1965 on which these photographs of the 6218 were made. The 6218 was finally retired on March 24, 1971 and moved to the Fort Erie Railway Museum in Fort Erie, Ontario, in October 1973, where it is on display. There is an interesting postscript to the CNR's steam excursions. Locomotive Number 6060, one of the twenty U1f-class 4-8-2s built by the Montreal Locomotive Works in 1944 (they were the last steam engines built for the CNR), had been retired from active service in 1959 and subsequently placed on static display in 1962. Ten years later the CNR restored it to operating condition for excursion service out of Toronto. According to information provided by

Frank Barry in 1976 the CNR announced it would run a special steam train that summer. Most interesting is the fact that the CN's summer timetables for 1976 and 1977 listed that steam special as Train No. 6060 scheduled between Toronto and Niagara Falls, Ontario. These trips were not excursions but bona fide scheduled passenger trains. The CNR gave the 6060 to the Province of Alberta on its centennial, in 1980. Today 6060 is currently owned and maintained by the Rocky Mountain Rail Society at Stettler, Alberta.



7 Reading Company locomotive Numbers 2124 and 2100 double-heading the first "Iron Horse Ramble," approaching Port Clinton, Pennsylvania, October 25, 1959.



8 Chicago & Eastern Illinois railroad depot, Princeton, Indiana. Originally built for the Evansville & Terre Haute Railroad in 1875. Train service ended in 1968. Slated for demolition in 1987, the depot was saved and turned into a library by a local group known as the Princeton Railroad Station, Inc., which has a ninety-nine-year lease on the property.



CHICAGO & EASTERN ILLINOIS RAILROAD, DEPOT, PRINCETON, INDIANA, 1966.

REQUIEM FOR STEAM THE RAILROAD PHOTOGRAPHS OF DAVID PLOWDEN

Stunning photographs by a master photographer documenting the last of the steam locomotives.

As a child, David Plowden was given a box camera, and before long he began to photograph railroad trains. As he matured and started on what would become a lifetime in photography, trains—specifically steam locomotives—became one of his passions, and then they were eclipsed by modern diesel locomotives. It is our good fortune that Plowden was on the scene at the end, documenting what would become this book, his reverent tribute to the steam era.

DAVID PLOWDEN is the author of more than twenty photography books, including *Vanishing Point: Fifty Years of Photography*. He lives in Winnetka, Illinois.

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