This is the story of how the Lehigh Valley Railroad consolidated many hastily built shortlines in upstate New York to create its Auburn Division in the late 1800s. Basically a rural railroad launched by colorful entrepreneurs, the division stood apart from the LV’s mainline segments—somewhat in the role of a gangly country cousin.

Traveling no less than 415 route miles in the scenic Finger Lakes region, light engines chugged along spindly single tracks, over bridges cheaply built to span glacial creeks and valleys. Business was mostly local, except a thread of Pennsylvania coal traffic. A healthy volume of farm products, particularly milk, made their way to urban markets. Passenger service, in great demand before the automobile appeared, was crude.

Despite all this, the Auburn Division was a serviceable railroad until the late 1930s. The arc of its growth followed that of most American railroads.

One prosperous stretch of the Auburn Division remains. Before the others were abandoned, they contributed richly to the history and economy of their region, recorded here in 190 illustrations and a graceful untangling of complicated tales.
The Lehigh Valley Railroad about 1960, after it began to contract by dropping segments of rural branches, including Canastota–Camden and East Ithaca–Horseheads trackage on the Auburn Division. The division’s full extent is shown on page 10 and subsequent maps.

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