

Librarian's Shelf by Karen Connell

Learn about Locomotives at your Library

On Saturday, March 4 at 2 PM Jim Reisdorff is coming to the Columbus Public Library to tell us about a man who wrecked trains for fun. This Western Railroad History program appeals to most everyone's suppressed desire to witness something destructive! Between 1896 and 1932, Iowa native Joseph S. Connolly staged more than 70 head-on train wrecks before large thrill-seeking audiences at state fairs and other public events nationwide. Known as "Head-On Joe," Connolly boasted that he destroyed 146 old steam locomotives during these collisions and never had anyone injured in the process. Based on the book that he wrote about these man-made calamities, "The Man Who Wrecked 146 Locomotives," Reisdorff tells about both the career of this professional train wrecker and the techniques that he used to stage a train wreck for public entertainment. Come see actual footage of these events and enjoy some refreshments!

Reisdorff will have copies of his book for sale following his presentation, and we will be purchasing a copy for the library collection. To get your name on the list to read "The Man Who Wrecked 146 Locomotives" call or stop by and ask for a Suggestion/Reserve Request slip.

In the meantime, choose from a variety of books we have available to brush up on railroad history or explore the evolution of the locomotive. "Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America" by Richard White and "Nothing Like it in the World: the Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad" by Stephen E. Ambrose detail the politics and logistics of the building of the transcontinental railroad. These two books are focused on the narrative with a few photos included. "Images of Rail: Nebraska's Cowboy Rail Line" by Keith Terry, on the other hand, is a collection of photos taken between 1880 and 1950 with detailed descriptions to give the history of the Cowboy Line in northern Nebraska.

Derek Hayes' "Historical Atlas of the North American Railroad" is more than just an atlas, compiling maps of railway routes. It's a collection of photos, advertisements, train schedules, and yes, maps; all with detailed descriptions. This book is organized chronologically and covers railway history across the whole of North America.

"Classic Trains" by Hans Halberstadt also covers railway history, but has more of an emphasis on the trains themselves. This oversized book features full page photos of locomotives, as well as drawings and advertising posters. Along with descriptions of each photo, Halberstadt includes other interesting facts and information regarding how and why each new progression of the locomotive was developed. Another pictorial history of locomotives is DK Smithsonian's "Train: The Definitive Visual History." Taking the history of trains a few years at a time, ten sections of this book track the rail revolution from the inception of steam engine locomotives to the takeover of diesel and electric powered trains. The tenth section explains the engineering behind steam, diesel, and electric locomotives. Filled with photos, drawings, maps, and diagrams, this book is one that can be easily browsed or scoured for every last detail.

Stop by or call the Columbus Public Library at 402-564-7116 if you have any questions about this upcoming program, books about railroads, or any other resources we offer.