

Death Rode the Rails: American Railroad Accidents and Safety, 1828–1965

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immigrants to Iowa would view their experience. As this nation debates immigration policy, this collection can help us see how past policies developed and how they affected those peoples whose dreams included America.

Death Rode the Rails: American Railroad Accidents and Safety, 1828–1965, by Mark Aldrich. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. xvi, 446 pp. Illustrations, tables, graphs, notes, appendixes, essay on sources, index. \$59.95 cloth.

Reviewer John Williams-Searle is director of the Center for Citizenship, Race, and Ethnicity Studies (CREST), the College of Saint Rose, Albany, New York. He is the author of "Courting Risk: Disability, Masculinity, and Liability on Iowa's Railroads, 1868–1900" (*Annals of Iowa*, 1999).

Mark Aldrich has written the field-defining work on railroad safety. In so doing, he reveals how technological innovation and public perception changed the relationship between the state and industry from 1828 to 1965. Through a mix of econometrics, policy and technology research, and social and cultural analysis, Aldrich delivers a perfect balance of intellectual rigor and subtle wit to rescue material that in other hands could be both dry and downbeat.

According to Aldrich, the early years of railroad development created "a uniquely American system of railroading that was also uniquely dangerous" (10). Long distances and sparse traffic necessitated an infrastructure so lightly built that it astounded skeptical European observers. The use of cost-saving measures such as light iron strap rails, single-track mainlines, and technologically inferior cast iron wheels contributed to the financial viability of American railroads but led to increased hazards for workers and passengers. The dizzying number of railroading accidents during the early years might lead one to conclude that there was little concern with safety regulation. Massachusetts took early action in the 1830s to require crossing markers and audible signals, but state regulation was haphazard at best. Instead, railroad companies and states developed a reactive relationship that Aldrich dubs *volunteerism*: whenever state regulatory agencies or legislatures threatened to actively police railroad safety, companies would voluntarily respond by incorporating new safety technologies and implementing new policies to demonstrate their good faith efforts to keep the passengers (though not their workers) safe. This basic pattern of threats and modest response remained little changed until Congress passed the Federal Railroad Safety Act, establishing federal control over all railroad safety in 1970.

While volunteerism sped up progress on passenger safety and may have been driven by public outrage over sensational crashes and explosions, it also helped companies to avoid addressing the so-called “little accident” that the public overlooked. Such small, everyday events resulted in the maiming or death of a single person (usually a railroad employee or trespasser) and added up to thousands of casualties over time. Outraged citizens responded to the scary possibilities of a chemical spill but tended to ignore grade crossing accidents, which killed far more people over time. Risk perception and the avoidance of bad press drove volunteerism, to the public’s detriment.

Further, Aldrich demonstrates that railroads used economic efficiency as the central measure in deciding whether to adopt safety technologies and policies. For example, when the Federal Employers Liability Act (1908) made companies economically liable for unsafe work practices, companies became more focused not just on implementing safety technologies, such as the air brake and automatic coupler, but also new safety training and policies, such as the Safety First campaign. Aldrich concludes that financially successful companies were the true safety innovators – that safety made good fiscal sense.

Despite the strength of Aldrich’s work, there are some flaws that detract from his interpretation. Iowans can be proud of their state’s place in the railroad safety movement, but one wouldn’t know that from reading Aldrich’s book; the Iowa Railroad Safety Appliance Act provided the template for the Federal Safety Appliance Act passed in 1893, but Aldrich gives that part of railroad safety history little attention. Likewise, he minimizes the contributions of Lorenzo S. Coffin, Iowa railroad commissioner during the mid-1880s and tireless railroad safety advocate from Fort Dodge, Iowa. Coffin was known nationally in the railroad safety movement and was a champion of that important force for change—workers themselves. Aldrich usually views workers, when he does so at all, through the company’s lens—negligently amputating their own limbs to undermine the company’s safety record. He relies heavily on company records and very little on railroad brotherhood journals, which he deems of little worth in understanding the development of safety technologies or policies. If he had examined such records more closely, however, he would have found that workers had a sophisticated understanding of volunteerism and eagerly involved themselves in a three-sided, usually cooperative relationship among employers, workers, and the state regulatory agencies. Railroad brotherhoods hired lobbyists to pressure politicians, and they cultivated public sympathies through poetry, art, song, and story. At every turn, they strove to improve safety incrementally while pre-

servicing profitability, knowing full well that a bankrupt railroad would not need engineers. To argue, as Aldrich does, that railroad safety developed primarily as a result of the push and pull between railroad companies and the state is to miss one-third of the debate. That said, Aldrich's work does provide an important corrective to the simplistic notion that railroad companies wanted nothing to do with safety before the era of federal regulation.

The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States, by Carla Yanni. Architecture, Landscape, and Material Culture Series. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. xi, 256 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$27.50 paper.

Reviewer Jane Simonsen is assistant professor of history and women's/gender studies at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. She is the author of *Making Home Work: Domesticity and Native American Assimilation in the American West, 1860-1919* (2006).

They ranged from small private asylums to sprawling country estates, from urban fortresses to cottage retreats. Celebrated architects Calvert Vaux, H. H. Richardson, and Frederick Law Olmsted designed them. Signs of civic accomplishment, moral healing, and architectural grandeur, insane asylums, Carla Yanni argues, exhibit the intersections between medical and material culture. Describing the nineteenth-century asylum as a "place of struggle" over the relationship between space and power, Yanni traces the cultural ideals built into asylum walls. She departs from histories of mental illness that acknowledge collaboration between architects and asylum managers as an interesting facet of psychiatric history in order to examine asylums themselves within U.S. cultural and architectural history.

Yanni begins, as many histories of mental illness do, by explaining how treatment in the United States borrowed from and reacted to the control of the insane in Europe, exemplified by hospitals such as Bethlem (Bedlam) in England. She explores the plan envisioned by psychiatrist Thomas Kirkbride, whose methods relied on categorization, separation, and a healthy atmosphere distinguished by light, ventilation, and distinctions between public and private space. There were many incarnations of this plan; these were marked less by consistency than by adaptations borne of necessity. Yanni highlights struggles to make medical ideals manifest in these enormous constructions as well as the importance of the edifice itself in presenting a public face to supporters. Constraints such as space, money, time, and public perception of mental illness created obstacles, as the ambitious plan was