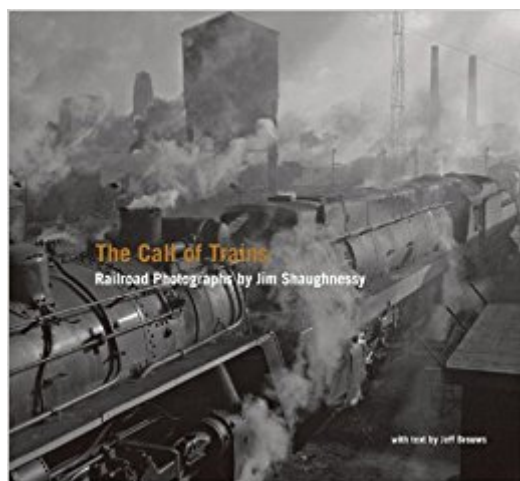


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The Call Of Trains: Railroad Photographs By Jim Shaughnessy



Synopsis

A majestic collection celebrating the life and work of one of the deans of railroad photography. Jim Shaughnessy is a revered name among railroad photographers. This collection, the best of his work over a forty-year career, features 170 duotone photographs taken between 1946 and 1988, with an emphasis on the railroad culture of the fifties and sixties. Jeff Brouws—a railroad authority and photo historian—has contributed a biographical essay that traces Shaughnessy's beginnings photographing steam locomotives in his hometown of Troy, New York, to his documentation of the dramatic steam-to-diesel transition, with an emphasis on the northeastern United States and Canada, where the concentration of railroad action and often deep snow resulted in beautiful and unusual images. Not just a compendium of photographs of locomotives, this book covers the whole railroad world—the sheds, tunnels, viaducts, yard stations, and more. It is a wonderful document of what is arguably railroading's most compelling era. 170 duotone photographs

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I have a confession to make: I am a railroad fan. I can't seem to resist a book, practically any book, about railroads. Thus, when I saw this one I was a bit more than just receptive to its message. However, I was not prepared for the absolutely stunning images provided by award winning train photographer Jim Shaughnessy and the informative, in-depth text by Jeff Brouws that places the images in biographical and historical context. This is the first monograph devoted exclusively to Shaughnessy and his wanderings from 1946 and 1988 documenting the dramatic steam-to-diesel

transition in the U.S. There are 170 incomparable images of trains, workers, depots, roundhouses and shops that comprise the entirety of the American railroad landscape during this historically tumultuous period in the railroad industry. I do not exaggerate when I say these images are virtually worthy of being framed and hung on the wall. This will appeal to both railroad enthusiasts and readers that appreciate really wonderful photographs along with text from an award winning writer about an era that is gone but surely not forgotten.

This is probably not going to be popular, based on other reviews here. I just got my copy of "The Call of Trains," and, based on a first view, I must say I have some misgivings. Some. Let me start by stating that, obviously, Jim is a tremendous railroad photographer. I work in black & white myself, and cannot come near his level of excellence. That being said, a few of the images in this book (very few) left me unsatisfied. Several are certainly not sharply focused, and several suffer from an extreme lack of depth of field. I would be interested to get either Brouws' or Mr. Shaughnessy's perspective on the inclusion of these images. I can't imagine that they were constrained by a lack of selection to choose from, and I cannot make the soft images work from a creative or "atmospheric" bent. One shows a desk inside a wayside structure, and hardly anything is in focus. Another is taken behind an engineer hanging out of a locomotive window, and the only thing in focus in the whole picture is the wind deflector. Finally, one of my favorite pictures in the whole book is the two page spread of SP Alcos being scrapped, and everything except the background is soft. Since JS works in 4x5, sharpness at this amount of enlargement should not be an issue. I work in 2 1/4 square and 11x14 is a breeze; 4x5 yields a negative more than 4 times the size. Secondly, I feel that some of the "human interest" shots seemed posed and unnatural. However, they were all well composed and excellently lit. OK, now the good stuff. This book is terrific. My previous misgivings about just a few pictures have been stated - if you are a train nut you need to own this.

Shaughnessy's night photos are on par with any I have ever seen, and many are so well lit that the lighting seems natural instead of artificial. Another reviewer here has referred to Link's work as a "gimic" (which are fightin' words), and in Link's case the lighting is effective but obvious. Here, again, many of the artificially lit shots seem natural. In Link's defense, I will mention that most of his subjects were in motion, unlike many other nighttime railroad photographers. Shaughnessy has lots of winter scenes that pose problems when shooting black locomotives against snowy backgrounds, but obviously through both great camera- and darkroom-work he has created fantastic images in nearly all of them. In addition, Jim has captured many nice scenes "in-town" in addition to the scenic rural shots, and I think it provides an important historical record of the human landscape that existed

at the time, and not just the railroad landscape. The city-scapes may be my favorites. I also love the wide scene with the lines of condemned cars and locos awaiting scrapping in Boston - very Plowden-ish. I wish I could let me give this book 4 3/4 stars, but I just can't quite give it 5. When I compare it to the other similar B&W RR works we have seen in the last decade (Stein's "Passion for Trains," Benson's "One Track Mind," Lamb's "Steel Wheels Rolling"), I feel this one comes up just one freckle short. Let me state again, I have not yet read this book, nor taken the time to absorb each picture (I spent two hours with it last night, it will take much longer than that to finalize my opinion), and I reserve the right to modify this review once I have fully digested it. Once again, you need this book. It will go on my shelf of honor with the aforementioned Stein, Benson, Plowden and Lamb, next to Beebe, Olmsted, Wood, and color shooters McDonnell and the died to young Gary Bensen. Shaughnessy certainly belongs in their company. Buy this book. Learn that light is more important than color.

Having a copy of 'a passion for trains' by the same author, I had no hesitation in buying another one of Jeff Brouws books. I wasn't at all disappointed as the content and reproduction are of the same high standard. It was also refreshing to have an 'eastern' vision of what I would call North America's finest railroading period, that of late steam to early diesel. Mr Shaughnessy shows that his work is up there with the very best of the American artists (as that's what they are) when it comes to composition, balance, lighting and human interest. He has also mastered the difficult craft of night lighting and shows the magic of the B&W medium to the maximum. Buy this book (along with 'a passion for trains'). You will cherish them. And to Mr Brouws - Great job, I eagerly await books on Kistler, and Kindig, before too long.

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