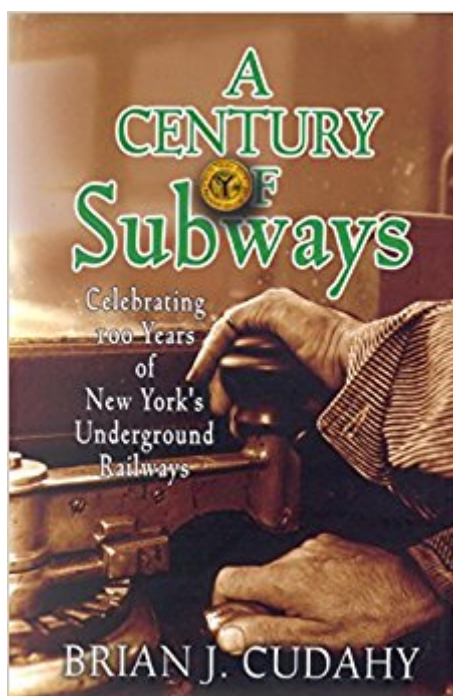


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A Century Of Subways: Celebrating 100 Years Of New York's Underground Railways



Synopsis

Brian Cudahy offers a fascinating tribute to the world the subway created. Taking a fresh look at one of the marvels of the 20th century, Cudahy creates a vivid sense of this extraordinary achievement—how the city was transformed once New Yorkers started riding in a hole in the ground.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Cudahy's book is a fascinating tour through the history of New York's subway system."

([Irish Voice](#)) "People have an idea that [the subway] is a rat's nest full of crime. None of that is true." ([Star](#))

Brian J. Cudahy's books include [Around Manhattan Island: And Other Maritime Tales of New York](#) and [A Century of Subways: Celebrating 100 Years of New York's Underground Railways](#) (both Fordham). He lives in Bluffton, SC.

Don't be misled by the title into thinking that this book is mainly about the history of the NYC subway system. While the genesis of the NYC subway is covered, particularly the first IRT line, it forms only a modest part of the book, which also describes the start of the Boston, London, Glasgow and other subways, and the development of the commuter rail network into New York City. The book also dwells a lot on the physical, mechanical and electrical attributes of rolling stock, electricity supply,

line construction methods, etc., for the various systems. While this does put the NYC subway system into context, it doesn't make for a particularly "light" read or give the reader an overall perspective on how the entire NYC subway system developed during the past 100 years and its impact on the city.

The book was well written and contained enough history without being too scholarly. It is annotated and contains a bibliography for those seeking more information or wish to delve into greater detail. Notably, the book discusses subways in other cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, and London. I would have liked to see a few more photographs included, but that is my only negative comment. For me, it was a good read.

This book is hard to take, even for a (former) New Yorker. For example, I didn't really need to know the manufacturer and dates of every subway car. I guess I was expecting something much more exciting. Couldn't force myself to get more than one-third through it. Perhaps if you're a real subway and railroad buff you might like this.

Cudahy has done a good job of outlining the history of New York subway systems. Good reading!

New York's subway system has been written about, painted, painted on, talked about, griped about, even sung about. (Don't sleep on the subway, darling...) There are a fair number of books about it, most of them are technical. And the technical achievements of the subway system are amazing. But only Brian Cudahy can write with the excitement and enthusiasm for this complex transit system to bring its history and experience to life. The word "Celebrating" in the subtitle is more indicative of his attitude than the bland "A Century of Subways." He starts with the asphyxiating conditions of Manhattan's streets immediately before 1900, and the need of developers, businessmen, and employers alike to expand into the other boroughs. This system, once built, would ease the overcrowding of Manhattan's slums, provide capital for real estate and housing barons in Brooklyn, Queens, The Bronx, and northernmost Manhattan, and turn places like Coney Island into true party spots. Of course, skeptics did abound: "New Yorkers will never go into a hole in the ground." And this is where Brian Cudahy then delivers to us the fanfare, thrills and--efficiency (!)--of the first subway ride, as bystanders cheered from clean, beautiful (!!) subway stations. At the center of it all is August Belmont, and the admiration Cudahy has for him is evident. Yet he doesn't resort to worshipping the tycoon/developer. A CENTURY OF SUBWAYS is a fun and

educational book. Its tone is miles away from his sober, but equally fascinating book, THE MALBONE STREET WRECK. While this disaster was waiting to happen in 1918, Cudahy, in A CENTURY OF SUBWAYS, savors the joyful moments of 1904. Rocco Dormarunno, author of THE FIVE POINTS CONCLUDED

An impressively informative work by transportation historian Brian J. Cudahy, A Century Of Subways: Celebrating 100 Years Of New York's Underground Railways tells of the amazing and critically important history of subway systems as a remarkable technological achievement in mass transportation which is legendary for its practicality. A grand presentation that takes the reader and subway enthusiast on a vivid trip through time as an aptly and extensively researched tribute to the visionaries and power brokers behind the creation of New York's famous subways, A Century Of Subways would grace the American History and Transportation History collections of any academic or community library system.

Cudahy does a great job detailing the development and progression of the New York City subway system, but his focus is much more on providing the necessary details almost in reference book form than in trying to construct any sort of compelling narrative. Conspicuously absent is any portrait of the key figures involved, or the social forces at work as the subway system was born and then rapidly expanded. The entire history of the New York system, in fact, is covered in the first seventy pages. While keeping the critical details about subway car specifications and the like, it would have done Cudahy well to provide much more gloss to these facts rather than occupying so many pages with discussions of the rail systems in London, Boston, and the New York suburbs. Other books on the specific subject in Cudahy's title do a much better job of painting the complete picture and might be better suited for the casual reader interested in a focused but complete history of the New York City subway system.

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