

## Hard Places: Reading the Landscape of America's Historic Mining Districts

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*Coal Towns* stands as a warning to historians about the use of such sources. Shifflett wants to replace the emphasis on corporate exploitation and class conflict in traditional labor historiography with a story of general satisfaction with company town housing and recreational facilities, of the company store as a community center, and of a lack of interest in the union. He uncritically bases sweeping conclusions about the company's intentions, the operation of company stores, and the role of the union on the primary sources he has used. He never stops to consider that it is no more surprising that company records should emphasize corporate beneficence than that oral history interviews should convey a wistfulness about a life gone by. Without careful analysis, one informed by secondary sources and critical thinking, such primary sources can be misleading. This, unfortunately, is the methodological lesson of *Coal Towns*, and it diminishes the value of the book's overall contribution.

*Hard Places: Reading the Landscape of America's Historic Mining Districts*, by Richard V. Francaviglia. American Land and Life Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991. xx, 237 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DAVID A. WALKER, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

Mining areas, especially in the Mountain West, continue to attract the interest of historians and the tourist public. The recently formed Mining History Association brings together academics with buffs in a cordial spirit of inquiry. Although interest remains in the California gold camps and the Comstock Lode, historians are now studying mine safety, entrepreneurial leadership and lifestyles, and the diverse gender, racial, and ethnic environment.

Richard Francaviglia traveled extensively for more than three decades studying the nation's "underappreciated" mining landscape. Focusing on coal and metals mining in the eastern Appalachian highlands, the Mississippi River valley, and the western mountain states, he divides his book into three chapters. He identifies the visual clues of mining activity, interprets the major processes or forces that shaped the landscape, and develops various public perceptions of the mining legacy.

Few places provide a better laboratory to study the interactive impact of nature and society than the landscape of mining districts. Certainly the most visible landscape features are changes in the topography, including landform and vegetation. These changes reflect cyclical mining activity, the expansion of open pits and slag

piles, and the impact of erosion and attempts at revegetation. The dominant social class structure—owners, managers, miners—and ethnic diversity are also visible on the mining landscape through residential, commercial, and church architecture. The author concluded that mining towns tended to be densely settled but rather prosperous and truly cosmopolitan and civic-minded locations.

Because settlement patterns and the resulting landscape are closely tied to the geologic structure of the ore body, nearly all mining areas were isolated at the time of discovery and development; most remain secluded today. This isolation dictates that diversified revitalization was a major factor in the survival of many communities after the mines closed. Aspen became a ski resort, Deadwood legalized gambling, and others perpetuated their images as ghost towns. Francaviglia concludes with a brief discussion of historic preservation and mining museums that offer underground tours and reconstructed towns.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this book is its collection of seventy-nine excellent photographs, maps, and diagrams. The text would not mean as much to the nonspecialist without this visual assistance. Although the author did a commendable job of providing examples from all sections of the country, most readers of this journal will concentrate on Minnesota's Iron Ranges, the Upper Peninsula copper country, and the lead mining regions of Missouri. Scattered references are made to Galena and southwestern Wisconsin; the coal mining landscape surrounding Buxton, Iowa, receives a mere casual comment.

The author of this interesting study presents a wide variety of personal experiences and interdisciplinary perspectives. The reading audience may be equally diverse but somewhat limited. A study of the cultural and physical landscape is far removed from the mainstream of mining history; on the other hand, few examples are developed thoroughly enough to appeal to local and regional historians. Historical geographers, architectural historians, and historic preservationists will be most attracted to this readable narrative.

*Woman from Spillertown: A Memoir of Agnes Burns Wieck*, by David Thoreau Wieck. Carbondale: Southern University Press, 1992. xiv, 280 pp. Notes, index. \$32.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DENNIS A. DESLIPPE, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Despite the outpouring of community and workplace studies in the past twenty years by labor historians, most authors of labor history

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