

teenth century address the large expansion of the collection in 1845, when portraits of earlier members were commissioned and others added; the social and cultural factors that dictated how photography was deployed; and reasons for the exclusion of certain individuals, such as gold speculators.

The art historian Paul Staiti closely examines the ideological purposes of the portraits, beginning with a summary of how various forms of literature and portraiture honored men from antiquity onward. He then discusses how artists used typologies in the chamber portraits to connote “stability, sameness, continuity, and tradition” (p. 167). Kusserow’s and Staiti’s interpretations of individual and collective portraits help readers look beyond prosaic readings of portraits (as a status symbol or authority figure, emphasized by clothing, props, or placement).

The historian Elizabeth Blackmar, in her comprehensive history of the chamber, describes it as a “community of interest” that provided support for the expansion of commerce throughout the nation and beyond (p. 189). Her close analysis of the workings of the chamber allows her to assess its changes in character and priorities over time. The architectural historian Daniel Bluestone examines the changing landscape around the buildings that housed the chamber, describes how the buildings appeared on the exterior and how those within viewed other buildings, and compares the structures to similar buildings, such as clubs and masonic lodges. He addresses the chamber’s choice not to erect a skyscraper at the turn of the twentieth century, describes their new structure as a monument rather than a commercial building, and discusses the inclusion of the Great Hall to display the portrait collection. The decorative arts scholar David Barquist analyzes the nineteenth-century frames that not only protected but also highlighted certain paintings through the frames’ size, level of embellishment, and gilding.

This volume provides a rare look at institutional portraits and their meanings and uses. High-quality, well-placed illustrations show readers the paintings *in situ* at various points in the organization’s history and deepen the essayists’ interpretations. The book can serve as a model for interpreting for corporations and

institutions, as well as the often-understudied collections of these organizations.

Anne Verplanck
Penn State Harrisburg
Middletown, Pennsylvania

doi: 10.1093/jahist/jau329

Gambling on Ore: The Nature of Metal Mining in the United States, 1860–1910. By Kent A. Curtis. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2013. xviii, 232 pp. \$39.95.)

Occasionally a book is published that has significance far beyond its apparent subject; it illumines a vast landscape, opening unexpected vistas and bridging unexplored lacunae. Such is the case with *Gambling on Ore* by the independent scholar and environmental historian Kent A. Curtis. In one sense the book’s subject is narrower than the subtitle suggests. Most of the narrative is focused on copper mining in Montana but, as with other deeply insightful works, the book offers a penetrating analysis applicable across a wide spectrum of human endeavor. It untangles a web of relationships connecting geology, finance, law, labor, and public policy. At its heart is humanity’s inextricable relationship with the natural world, minerals included.

Curtis confesses he began his project intending to tell a morality tale of the ruination of western Montana by the world’s largest copper mining company. The metaphor of “rape” was ready at hand, but as Curtis pursued his research he came to understand his story as far more complicated and uncertain (p. 5). The emerging metaphor was one of a “failed marriage,” with a nexus of relationships that extended vertically and horizontally, reaching far beyond the mines and smelters of Montana (p. 6). Risks and uncertainties abounded in these relationships, from the hardscrabble days of alluvial gold mining to the advent of mega-industrial lode mining. Gold rush chaos was as endemic to Montana as it was to California, setting in motion fundamental revolutionary changes for the individual states and for the nation. “It might then be said,” Curtis concludes,

that the crucial turning point in the body politic of US society, and the origins of today's emergent global society, was not the closing of the agricultural frontier in the 1890s but rather the spawning of the mining frontier in California in the mid-nineteenth century. (p. 208)

Acknowledging his indebtedness to Richard White's seminal study, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (1995), Curtis reflects on the collapse of his naively dualistic view of nature and artifice. He reminds us that much of the built environment of the industrial and postindustrial world is literally hardwired with the nature-based products of metal mining. Copper mining made possible not only the mass electrification of the globe but also the evolution of weapons of mass destruction, from World War II to the present. Personal computers and smart phones are only the latest copper-hungry technologies we take for granted without regarding their dependence on the nature of a naturally occurring mineral. "Today, one hardly considers the extensive mining inputs found in our most ubiquitous twenty-first-century technologies," Curtis observes, "The legacy of mining permeates every corner of our modern lives" (p. 208).

This book is not just a history of American mining; it is a book that mines American history. It deserves the widest possible reading.

James J. Rawls
Diablo Valley College
Pleasant Hill, California

doi: 10.1093/jahist/jau292

Western Union and the Creation of the American Corporate Order, 1845–1893. By Joshua D. Wolff. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. xii, 305 pp. \$90.00.)

Some capitalists like to compete, others not so much. Joshua D. Wolff has written a compelling history of the rise of the Western Union Telegraph Company, underscoring its efforts to establish a monopoly in the nineteenth-century U.S. telegraph market. Drawing from multiple archives, Wolff makes important contributions to the history of nineteenth-century political economy.

In 1866 Western Union's market share was 90 percent. Early chapters of Wolff's book narrate the dizzying scramble that followed Samuel Morse's 1847 telegraph patent. Entrepreneurs critical to the growth of Western Union quickly learned one important lesson: because of weak demand, and the telegraph's network effects, competition was "profitless" (p. 40). So Western Union eventually bought out its competitors, becoming, in Wolff's words, "the first national big business" (p. 14).

National telecommunications could be construed, in old republican language, as an "internal improvement," which the state should promote. That happened, but in ways attuned to the interests of Western Union's shareholders, many of whom sat in Congress. The Telegraph Act of 1866 was "an entering wedge" against monopoly, but not much more. The act did grant the federal government authority to, in effect, nationalize telegraphy, heartening those who believed that the U.S. Postal Service was the right model. But the act had the perverse incentive of encouraging Western Union's owners to inflate the company's stock price, if only to stave off a government purchase.

Inflating the stock price was Western Union's core business strategy anyway. The corporation, Wolff argues, was run in the interests of its financial investors. Its nominal capital was watered (the stock typically sold at one-third par value), demanding the diversion of operating revenue toward dividend payments and away from capital investments, or wages.

Ownership of Western Union stock in the 1860s was "diffuse" (p. 173). Wolff unfortunately is unable to say more about these investors. They were not in the saddle for long. In the late 1870s Jay Gould wrested control of Western Union from William H. Vanderbilt. Gould, with friends in Congress, mobilized dummy corporations while announcing his intent to compete with Western Union. When Western Union stock dipped, Gould bought it up, before persuading Vanderbilt to acquire these faux competitors. The strategy worked so well that soon Gould himself controlled Western Union. With that Wolff's drama comes to a close.

This book can be read alongside Richard White's *Railroaded* (2011). In both works the