



Mining Irish-American lives: western communities from 1849 to 1920

by Alan J. M. Noonan, Louisville, University Press of Colorado, 2022, xi + 365 pp., US\$53.00 (hardback), ISBN: 978-1-6464-2250-0

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BOOK REVIEWS

Mining Irish-American lives: western communities from 1849 to 1920, by Alan J. M. Noonan, Louisville, University Press of Colorado, 2022, xi + 365 pp., US\$53.00 (hardback), ISBN: 978-1-6464-2250-0

Using an amazing array of primary and secondary sources, Alan J.M. Noonan does indeed mine for details about the Irish and their lives during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period of intense mining in the American West. He delves deep into the history of the mining community and how Irish culture helped shape the landscape. Interesting additions such as an appendix of Irish songs and poetry and a few notes from the miners themselves lend authenticity and credibility to the material.

Chapters one and two cover the journey from Ireland to mine, starting with the gold rush in California and moving out across the Southwest and Midwest United States. Here, the author makes good use of census data, and he includes a brief look at female Irish miners before turning to the broader issue of the time period's Irish and Irish-American mining towns and culture. The Irish were perceived differently from other ethnic groups because that is how they perceived themselves. Facing discrimination and bigotry, they responded by emphasizing the importance of their communities and shared Irish heritage. Being Irish Catholic was paramount, as was maintaining the bond between miners and their family members back in Ireland.

Chapter three continues this theme by focusing on the more fraternal and social side of Irish life. Here, Noonan attempts to glean the thoughts and feelings of the miners from letters to and from their families either back East or in Ireland. Songs, stories, and poems were another way the Irish community maintained solidarity, and the author uses these judiciously to emphasize certain viewpoints. Readers are also introduced to the many "secret" societies (fraternities) created, almost all of which are listed in the local papers! Additionally, "Irish" became close to synonymous with "union" in the minds of outsiders, but solidarity across culture and business proved useful.

Increasing mechanization of the mining industry only served to further this solidarity. Unions grew stronger, and mine owners responded by hiring detective agencies to spy on union members, instituting "hiring cards" to gather possibly useful information about employees, and even creating the company store in an effort to hold the lives of miners' hostage by forcing them to use wage money for necessary items. However, these actions simply caused the Irish to further unite.

Chapters four and six explore specific mining towns, such as Leadville and Marysville, while chapter five, continues the battle of the unions. It also gives insight into the mental state of the miners themselves. Mining proved a mobile line of work, with men frequently moving from one job opportunity to

the next due depending on wages and working conditions. Guilt was a problem for many, as their families back in Ireland wanted them home, but they had no money to return. The American Dream of being able to have steady work and good wages was proving false, but the migrations continued.

Chapter six focuses mainly on Butte, Montana, home to the Anaconda Copper mine owned by Michael Daly. Daly was known for being sympathetic to unions and for hiring Irish workers, which caused the Irish population of Butte to rise to a higher level than anywhere else in the country. Even though fatalities were high due to the pollution from the smokestacks, the city continued to grow. The men considered it worth the price to be able to make a good wage and send home remittances.

By 1917, however, younger Irish-Americans were not as invested as their elders, and fraternities and unions collapsed for lack of support. Furthermore, new mine owners were only interested in profits. This generational divide led to class fighting and by 1925 the Irish mining era had come to an end. The book's conclusion gives readers a glimpse into the often-disappointing return home some miners were able to make. Many problems plagued the returnees, mainly because too much time had passed, and nothing was the same. It was a bittersweet reunion for many.

Noonan adeptly details the lives and culture of the Irish miners and the pitfalls they faced. Though the timeline can be difficult to follow, the book provides a wealth of information on both unions and company leaders. The look at the more pleasant side of Irish social life in these mining towns was a welcome, though brief, respite. Overall, this book is worthwhile for anyone interested in the history and culture of the Irish in the United States.

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Community of peace: performing geographies of ecological dignity in Colombia, by Christopher Courtheyn, Pittsburg, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022, Xx + 284 pp., US\$55.00 (cloth), ISBN: 978-0-8229-4714-1.

In *Community of Peace: Performing Geographies of Ecological Dignity in Colombia*, Christopher Courtheyn delves into the intersection of racialization, colonialism, and their impact on the people of San Jose de Apartado, Columbia. Courtheyn's exploration of peace practices during war and a novel philosophy of peace challenges readers to reconsider the possibility of peace amidst global