

Book Reviews

new to Civil War–era historiography will find much to consider in this biography.

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Mining Irish-American Lives: Western Communities from 1849 to 1920. By Alan J. M. Noonan. (Louisville: University Press of Colorado, 2022. Pp. 378. \$53.00 hardcover; \$43.00 ebook)

Alan J. M. Noonan has written a richly documented book. The author utilized many sources in writing his account of the Irish-born and American-born Irish in the mining West. In the period he discusses, beginning with the California Gold Rush and ending in 1920, the Irish West generally means the mining industry that developed west of Denver, but not too far south.

What Noonan's detailed book does is to highlight the Irish West. The West is often about smaller groups. Along with the Irish, the Chinese were another part of this area, and so were Mexicans north of the border. But as Elliott Barkan notes in his history of immigrants in the West, they included a number of groups, some of whom Noonan discusses only briefly in their relation to the Irish. Just when does a town become Irish when so many other groups also populated the area? We certainly need such a study that gives us a detailed review of Irish miners, and Noonan certainly provides an interesting account of Irish miners and mining towns.

Noonan does not relate conflicts between immigrants, American citizens, and Indigenous people. In short, he focuses on one group; while important, this is not the history of the vast American West. Reading Noonan's book, one can learn a great deal about the Irish workers, but with more limited attention to other aspects of U.S. western history.

Noonan's sources include many tables drawn from censuses of particular ethnic groups throughout the period from 1849 to 1920. In addition to the statistical data, he has included the words

of Irish miners from letters generously provided by Kerby Miller. He thanks Miller and also references the work of David Emmons on the Irish in mining regions of the American West (especially Butte, Montana). Noonan has not neglected the usual sources found in newspapers and general histories of western towns and cities. The richness of these sources is the strength of the book, and historians can profit from reading it. As Noonan says, mining was essential for the development of the American industrial economy; in this sense Irish and Irish Americans played an important role in American history outside of large cities such as Boston or New York.

At the same time, the census data is of limited value. It reveals that several ethnic groups played a role, and that the Irish were a minority. In looking at that minority, however, we can gain a view into the lives of these subjects, in more detail than was previously known. The words of the miners can fill in the missing gaps, and he uses them to tell us many facts, beliefs, and details that the census does not.

At the same time, this reviewer found some gaps. Noonan does include detailed material explaining how mining developed and the particular role of the Irish. Noonan should have written more about how the Irish learned of mining in America and the process of getting there. He begins with the famine Irish and the Gold Rush in California. The period 1849 to 1920 was a long period. We do not learn much about the Irish who came after the Gold Rush; surely, they were different from the forty-niners.

Were things different after the 1880s when machines and capital began to be more important in digging the earth? Noonan thinks that Irish workers played a role even when technology was more important. The letters he cites explained the miners' intention to return to Ireland, but of course so many did not, and they became Irish Americans.

Also missing is the work of the miners, which was a rough and dangerous way to make a living. The second half of the book does more of this when Noonan discusses unions, strikes, violence, and other miners, even the successful immigrants who did well (at least financially). The reader is left a bit uncertain about which Irish Noonan is discussing: the famine Irish or those who came much later. Noonan does discuss the emergence of success-

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ful Irish in Virginia City, Nevada, and Butte, Montana.

Noonan is strong on the development of the changes in mining. Yet, I believe he should have explained to the reader just who was coming. The Gold Rush generation drew from many countries, and included the Chinese, who faced considerable violence and hostility. Noonan provides a good discussion of how the Catholic Irish, who were white, confronted a different form of nativism based on religion.

Nowadays historical accounts include much on gender. Of course, in the nineteenth-century western mining towns the role of women was limited to tending the bar, raising children, and the sex trade, not necessarily in mining itself. Noonan is especially strong on the miners (and women) in the second half of the book. I think that he was trying to get everything included in the first half, but when he deals with Virginia City in Nevada or other places in the mining West the book becomes a rich social history.

DAVID M. REIMERS is a professor emeritus at New York University. He is the author of *Unwelcome Strangers: American Identity and the Turn against Immigration* (1999), *Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America* (1992), and coauthor, with Leonard Dinnerstein, of *The World Comes to America: Immigration to the United States since 1945* (2012).

American Dude Ranch: A Touch of the Cowboy and the Thrill of the West. By Lynn Downey. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2022. Pp. 246. \$24.95 paperback; \$19.95 ebook)

Lynn Downey's *American Dude Ranch* weaves history with popular culture to create a vibrant, entertaining ride into the dude ranch industry. Included are stories about the ranch owners who began charging visitors to venture West, as well as reflections on the myriad ways dude ranches reflected, and were reflected in, the broader culture through fashion, car culture, films, radio, rodeo, and television. The role of women, African Americans, Native peoples, and LGBTQ individuals are also considered. Dude ranches, Downey argues, are an important window into the ways the imagined West circulated in the United States from their origins to today. "However contested and complicated," Downey writes, "western history is one of America's national origin stories