

and miners of the Far North. Dennis Larsen's *Slick as a Mitten* is a summary of that adventure as well as the first publication of the many letters Meeker wrote home, the heart of the book.

A retired history teacher, Larsen became infatuated with the collection of letters held by the Washington State Historical Society within the Ezra Meeker papers. He transcribed them, supplied annotations, and highlighted them throughout with a wealth of historic photographs. Meeker, a bankrupt hops grower in Puyallup, Washington, learned of the Klondike strike like so many other people, when the steamship *Portland* arrived in Puget Sound with a ton of gold on board.

At the age of sixty-eight, Meeker joined the rush not as a miner, but as a merchant of fresh provisions, chickens, and canned soup vegetables. His letters to his wife detail his journey up the Inside Passage to Skagway, over the snow-covered Chilkoot Pass, then down the Yukon in a scow to Dawson, followed by a quick second trip to the Sound and back for more provisions. He spent the winter at his Log Cabin Grocery, Dawson, Yukon Territory. Mining finally tempted him into the diggings in the spring of 1899, where he lost his store profits, "slick as a mitten."

That part of the Klondike gold rush experience—the trials of the trails and diggings—has been told often in other books, published diaries, and memoirs. However, what is an outstanding addition to the Klondike's recorded history is Meeker's letters from the north over the next three years. Where most journals end after the arrival in Dawson, Meeker's letters reveal the rapid transformation of the North, coincident with the construction of the White Pass & Yukon Route railroad and steamboat systems. By 1900, Dawson was a major city with all the comforts of a home in the lower forty-eight, except that the temperature might occasionally drop to fifty degrees or more below zero.

Meeker was a merchant, not a miner, and his experiences are typical, which makes them more valuable, since they are the only ones in such de-

tail of a merchant yet published. His youngest son, and his youngest daughter's family lived in the North with him, adding a dimension to the social story, especially about family and home life. His son Fred died in Dawson in 1901 at age 38, possibly a result of drink, as Meeker suggested in letters to his wife. Shortly thereafter, in April 1901, Meeker left Dawson for good.

The letters contain much gossip, details on travel and the grocery business, as well as some information on mining at nearby Grand Forks on "Little Skookum Creek," where Meeker leased a mine. The rich detail and colorful anecdotes—such as the note about the five hundred crated "chicks drooping a little" after their five hundred-mile boat trip—add to these excellently edited letters. Larsen has provided an appropriate amount of introductory material and ends with a brief retelling of the rest of the main characters' lives. This is a fine addition to the literature of Western mining experiences in general and the Klondike gold rush in specific.

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Duane A. Smith. *The Trail of Gold and Silver: Mining in Colorado, 1859–2009*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2009; 301 pp., 32 b&w photos, map, notes, bib. essay, ind., cloth, \$27. ISBN: 9780870819575

Others have written of Colorado's frontier days, through the booms and busts of the intervening years, to the environmental age we live in today, but—somehow—Duane A. Smith, with eagerness and enthusiasm, has managed to tie it all together.

I was particularly glad to see *The Trail of Gold and Silver* published in 2009—Colorado mining's sesquicentennial year. As a Colorado resident, I've been involved in the 150th anniversary celebration of Boulder—a town that started as a supply center for "Mountain District No. 1," now

known as Gold Hill. Thanks, Duane, for mentioning that the first issue of the (sadly) now-defunct *Rocky Mountain News* reported on the Gold Hill District's mining activity—the very first publicized gold strike of the Colorado gold rush.

Smith generously quotes from primary sources, which makes his subjects come alive. For instance, in his account of journalist Horace Greeley's June 1859 visit to Gregory's Diggings, Smith slips in Greeley's observation that "next to outright and indisputable gambling, the hardest (though sometimes the quickest) way to obtain gold is to mine for it." Then Smith describes Greeley as "optimistic and positive, yet constructive and moralistic," explaining that the eastern visitor foresaw and wrote about the need for farmers, merchants, and others to mine the miners.

After taking his readers through mining ventures of the nineteenth century—the era when mining was the mainstay of Colorado's economy—Smith writes of "mucking through" the Great Depression prior to the federal government's price support for gold, which ushered in a revival in 1934. Then, in 1942, came the opposite—the Gold Limitation Order that shut down mining operations deemed non-essential to the

war effort. In the 1960s, the mining industry was nearly blind-sided by what Smith calls "the great environmental awakening." Yet, as Smith points out, tourists busily snapped photos of the remaining mining landscapes.

In his chapter "Mining on the Docket of Public Opinion," Smith sensitively stimulates his readers to think about the ironies between the tide of public opinion against the mining industry versus the public's lack of awareness that "if it can't be grown, it has to be mined."

It is hard to cover 150 years and still please everyone. I would have liked to have seen more on Boulder County, including Horace Tabor's last mining venture, the Eclipse Mine, that just happens to be within walking distance of my home. But, *The Trail of Gold and Silver* is a book on the whole state and, in 282 pages, Smith gives us a fresh and lively narrative of Colorado mining from 1859 to 2009. As he states near the end of his book, 150 years of mining "is a fascinating story, one well worth digging into with vigor." Smith does just that.

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