

Duane A. Smith and John L. Ninnemann. *San Juan Legacy: Life in the Mining Camps*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009; 181 pp., 81 b&w illus., map, ind., paper, \$25. ISBN: 9780826346506.

This volume is a sequel to author Duane Smith and photographer John Ninnemann's *San Juan Bonanza: Western Colorado's Mining Legacy*, published in 2006, also by New Mexico Press. The two volumes contain the same jacket typefaces and color schemes, although *San Juan Bonanza* is hardbound and *San Juan Legacy* a paperback.

The former volume concentrated on the settlement and development of the urban San Juans, and its photography concentrated on structures and mining scenes. *San Juan Legacy*, as its subtitle suggests, focuses more on the social aspects and everyday life of these communities, while its photography centers on historical artifacts.

San Juan Bonanza consisted of only two chapters: the settling and the urbanizing. *San Juan Legacy* is divided topically into twelve chapters. The topics are: the business community, law and order, newspapers, transportation, home-making, childhood and education, medical, religious, fraternal, the red light, culture and the arts, and sports. Smith gathers primary testimony chiefly from San Juan newspapers published in Durango, Silverton, Ouray, Telluride, Rico, Lake City, and Creede, along with a few contemporary guide books and reminiscences.

Smith has written extensively about these subjects over the past forty-plus years, and devotees of his previous works will find familiar themes articulated in this offering in his usual easy-going style. Its business leadership was the source of a community's persistence and vitality; good transportation often made the difference between prosperity and failure; religion, fraternity, and culture provided continuity and community on the remote and transient mining frontier; the red light district was a necessary evil; nineteenth-century medicine was a thing usually better avoided.

Ninnemann's accompanying photographs are mostly of the artifacts of everyday life extant in the region's museums, along with a few exterior photographs. A couple of the exteriors are repeated from *San Juan Bonanza*. Ninnemann retains the period mood in his exteriors by resorting to shots of antique baseball re-enactments and buildings framed so as to hide the automobiles. Some photos are not reproduced as crisply as in the previous volume, though that might have as much to do with the hazards of indoor photography as with the processes of duplicating images for publication.

Alas, the work of New Mexico Press was not up to its previous standard in some other areas as well. It sometimes appears as if the press used a spell checker instead of a person to do the editing. The word that appears is almost always correct, but sometimes it is not the correct word.

The book also features typos, redundancies, and some missing words—the worst example of the last being the omission of the fourth and fifth lines from the first stanza of Cy Warman's famous poem about Creede.

So consider *San Juan Legacy* a pleasant volume especially useful for readers fresh to the subject, though unfortunately lacking the production quality of its predecessor.

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Dennis M. Larsen. *Slick as a Mitten, Ezra Meeker's Klondike Enterprise*. Pullman: Washington State University Press, 2009; 136 pp., photos, maps, notes, bib., ind., paper, \$25. ISBN: 9780874223026

Ezra Meeker is best known today as the old timer who, early in the twentieth century, set out to mark and preserve the Oregon Trail. But in 1898, like thousands of other Americans, he was swept up in the Klondike gold rush and spent the next three years trying his luck among the mines

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