

locale. "Mining history" certainly profits from studies that examine not just mining and miners, but the societies that they created or imported into the regions they developed, and studies of the supporting communities that facilitated mining: smelting centers, transportation hubs, seats of finance or government.

The book employs surprisingly little archaeological evidence, given the author's long association with Skagway's archaeology. Spude generally draws evidence from the written sources frequented by historical archeologists and public historians: newspapers, tax records, census data, Sanborn maps, and court proceedings.

The work contains little of economic history or of the history of community decline. Might the economic and accompanying population decline—from 1,336 male residents in 1900 to 195 in 1920—have been just as significant in the dwindling of the vice district as the moral desires of Skagway's reformers? Could factors outside of the community, such as national war aims, have been the reason for vice's final defeat? Under pressure from the military, the mayor of New Orleans closed that city's famous restricted district, Storyville, in the very same month as federal authorities in Alaska Territory terminated the one in Skagway.

Spude writes perceptively in her conclusion about the damage that the tourism of subsequent years, with its hooker-with-the-heart-of-gold and good-time-girl formulations, has inflicted upon an accurate comprehension of the historical realities of frontier prostitution. She believes that "to understand the actual story of reform and vice, and to do it justice, requires changing the image of the 'good-time girl' to that of a middle-class business woman fulfilling a role until the moral reform people convinced the rest of the town that the community no longer had a place for that particular Necessary Evil."

This identification of prostitutes as middle-class, capitalist entrepreneurs has been previously articulated in the historical literature about west-

ern vice districts (e.g., Paula Petrik's *No Step Backward: Women and Family on the Rocky Mountain Mining Frontier, Helena, Montana, 1865-1900*). One wonders about the universality of such a characterization, however.

Setting aside the opprobrium which such entrepreneurship brought down upon its "middle-class" practitioners, prostitution also had an internal class structure. The madam organizing, capitalizing, and profiting from the sex trade was usually an older woman who had retired from such activities herself. Her charges, "the girls of the line," however, had decidedly working-class roles. They exchanged physical effort in dance halls, saloons, bordellos, and cribs for wages, while surrendering a percentage of their earnings to "management."

These were two distinctly different relationships to the sex trade. Spude had little choice but to focus on the madams, the only ones leaving sufficient evidence thanks to their ownership of property and encounters with law enforcement. Alas, the lives of ordinary sex workers now a century gone are mostly beyond the reach of even so capable a chronicler as Catherine Holder Spude.

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Ronald M. James and Susan A. James. *A Short History of Virginia City*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2014; 158 pp., 61 b&w photos, 2 maps, bib., ind., paper, \$22. ISBN: 9780874179477

Books written over the past century and a half on Virginia City, Nevada, have described almost every aspect of the famous Comstock Lode and its role in the formation of the state of Nevada. Writings explore the discovery and exploitation of the world-class silver-gold deposit, the city built by the mineral wealth, and the people—from scruffy prospectors to wealthy mine owners and financiers—who made it all happen. Ronald and Susan James have added to this library of informa-

tion in their earlier publications on Virginia City, and their latest work, *A Short History of Virginia City*, deserves a special spot on your bookshelf.

Although titled “a short history,” the James’ book provides thorough coverage of the important events and characters that contributed to the story of the Comstock. For those just developing an interest in Virginia City, this book is an excellent starting point. For those wanting to dig deeper into some facet of Comstock history, the bibliography provided will lead you into whatever specialized Comstock topic catches your interest.

The first chapter describes the 1849 gold discovery at the mouth of Gold Canyon and tells of the placer miners who tediously followed the gold showings up-canyon, resulting in the discovery of the lode outcrop near present-day Gold Hill in 1859. The role of the ill-fated Grosh brothers and the stories of the important players in the events of the 1859 discovery are covered in detail, as are the later technical and logistical problems related to mining and milling Comstock ores.

There is a concise description of the geologic setting of the Comstock and the general layout of its faults and veins. Here, a simple plan map and cross section of the Lode would have made the descriptions of mining conditions and later litigation a little easier to understand. The use of the term “eruption” to refer to the nature of the surface exposure of the orebody is a little misleading. Outcrops were the result of a long period of erosion removing barren rock to eventually expose ore, not the result of a violent event extruding minerals at the surface. Also, on page 20, the diagram of the square-set timbering method should have been credited to Elliot Lord, not Eugene Hattori.

As in a good novel, the authors weave seemingly unrelated stories into their plot, clues to events revealed later. One such story in the first chapter tells of a Dr. Bryant, who arrived in Nevada in 1860 in time to treat those wounded in the Pyramid Lake War, a confrontation with the Paiutes, and remained to practice medicine in Virginia City. A few pages on, we learn that the

unfortunate doctor died in 1866 as the result of a drinking problem. The following year, however, his widow, Marie Louise, married John Mackey and later shared in the fortune generated by Mackey’s “Big Bonanza” discovery.

Chapter Two moves beyond the mines and climbs topside to concentrate on the community of Virginia City. Samuel Clemens and his literary cohorts, the businessmen and their landmark buildings such as Piper’s and Maguire’s opera houses, the churches, the International Hotel, Virginia City’s famous prostitutes, and even the U.S. Army’s ill-fated experiment with using camels to haul supplies to the Comstock are covered in this chapter. An example of the far-reaching influence of this time and place, little known but told here, is the story of John McCone and his Pioneer Foundry. From its Comstock beginnings, the business later moved to California and, as the Bechtel-McCone Company, was one of the greatest producers of Liberty ships during World War II.

Chapter Three takes us through the glory days of the Comstock, basically the 1870s. Starting with controversy, we learn of the one-ledge versus many-ledges battle between adjacent claim holders over who had the right to mine a ledge, or vein, to depth below its surface outcrop. This is a complex subject, and, as recommended for Chapter One, a sketch map showing general layout of the Comstock veins would have been helpful. The rise and fall of the “Bank Crowd,” the discovery of the “Big Bonanza” in 1873, the ascension of John Mackey and his partners, who replaced the “Bank Crowd,” the Virginia and Truckee Railroad, and the construction of a water system that brought water from the Sierra Nevada to the Comstock are also described in Chapter Three. Although it can be a little confusing to follow events that overlap in time rather than being consecutive, the authors give an excellent summary of this era of Comstock history.

Chapter Four covers the Great Fire of 1875, a disaster that destroyed a large part of the city.

The authors give us descriptions of where the fire raged and tell the fate of entire sections of the city. This is great information and, used in conjunction with the walking tour included at the end of the book, will be helpful to visitors to Virginia City.

Chapter Five brings the Virginia City story up to the present day. Mining is still important, but more as a historical backstory upon which the current tourist industry has been built. The authors bring together the events of the last half of the twentieth century that have given us the Virginia City that we see today. Historians and historical characters Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg, hippies who strayed from San Francisco in the 1960s, Joe Conforte of Mustang brothel fame, and even the Bonanza television series all find a place in this chapter.

After wrapping up the Virginia City story, past and present, the James' present what I believe is the highlight of their publication—a walking tour. This section of their book contains a map of the city showing locations of major buildings and other points of interest and text that provides pertinent historical facts about each location.

A few additions would have improved the section, however. Several interesting sites described

in the text are not shown on the accompanying map. These include the Piper-Beebe house on A Street, the Delta Saloon and Way It Was Museum on C Street, the Episcopal Church on F Street, and the St. Mary Louise Hospital at the foot of Union Street. The King Mansion, located incorrectly on A Street, is actually one street above, on Howard Street. With the exception of the Combination Shaft, the historic mine shaft sites in the city have been overlooked. This omission might upset mining history buffs, and even the weekend tourist may be left wondering what those large piles of colorful dirt scattered about the city are about. Overlooking these minor quibbles, for the historian and casual visitor alike, the walking tour with its town map and accompanying text are an invaluable addition to information on Virginia City.

In their introduction, the James' write that their goal "is to offer a portrait of a place and its past presented in an approachable way." In five well-written chapters and a much-appreciated walking tour, they have succeeded in accomplishing their goal.

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Top: Virginia City, Nevada, from the cemetery northeast of town. The Episcopal and Catholic churches are at left. The business district lines C Street at center. The monument is to Sarah Hallock, who died June 20, 1871 "Aged 24 Y'rs, 8 M's, and Twelve Days."

Bottom: Tourist-oriented historic mining districts are often ambivalent about continued mining. In the middle distance, looking south down Gold Canyon from the divide between Virginia City and Gold Hill, lies an open pit last worked in 1981. The company suspended operations after residents defeated its plan to relocate the highway in order to enlarge the pit.

Virginia City's class contrasts stand two blocks apart on B Street.

Left: The brick Miners' Union Hall was built in 1876, after the union's previous hall burned in the great fire of 1875. The "Miners' Protective Association," organized in 1863, was the first miners' union west of the Mississippi.

Right: "The Castle," a Second Empire-style mansion built in 1868 for mine superintendent Robert Graves, includes such amenities as silver doorknobs and marble fireplaces.