

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.

Joe Tingley
Reno, Nevada

Next Page

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.

