

leisurely page turning. This is a beautifully presented book, filled with exquisite detail on nearly a century and a half of the history of the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River and the people who live there.

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Doug Ammons. *A Darkness Lit by Heroes: The Granite Mountain-Speculator Mine Disaster of 1917*. Missoula, MT: WaterNymph Press, 2017; 229 pp., 11 b&w illus., 5 maps, glos., paper, \$22. [A historical novel.] ISBN: 9780692900420

On the night of June 8, 1917, fire broke out in the shaft of the North Butte Mining Company's Granite Mountain Mine in Butte, Montana. As the fire spread from a ruptured, oil-soaked electrical cable to the timbers of the shaft and the stations at the various levels of the mine, toxic gases spread through the North Butte's mine workings in both the Granite Mountain and Speculator mines, trapping scores of men who were working that shift.

Some were overcome by smoke and the carbon monoxide produced by incomplete combustion and killed quickly, some were able to escape into the workings of neighboring mines of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, and handfuls of men tried to save themselves by bulkheading themselves in drifts where they hoped the smoke would not spread. Some of the men in the latter category were eventually rescued days later, but many died. All told, 166 miners lost their lives in the Granite Mountain Mine fire, also sometimes called the Speculator fire in Butte. It remains the worst hardrock mining disaster in United States history.

The Granite Mountain disaster was a traumatic episode for the people of Butte. It received extensive coverage in Butte newspapers. The results of a federal government investigation were published by the U.S. Bureau of Mines as *Lessons*

of the Granite Mountain Fire (1922). Historians of Butte nearly always give the event some attention, and lore of the disaster looms large in the reminiscences of Butte natives.

Until Doug Ammons' account, published as *A Darkness Lit by Heroes: The Granite Mountain-Speculator Mine Disaster of 1917*, the most extensive historical treatment of the fire has been Michael Punke's *Fire and Brimstone: The North Butte Mining Disaster of 1917* (2006). Punke is an attorney, not an academic historian, yet he followed scholarly conventions in writing *Fire and Brimstone*, including extensive notes citing the sources of quotes and other important historical information.

Ammons takes a different approach. Although he conducted extensive historical research in newspapers, the federal investigation, and most notably the six hundred pages of testimony collected during the coroner's inquest—which has recently been made available to the public at the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives—Ammons chose not to follow scholarly conventions in his account of the Granite Mountain disaster. One might call the book a non-fiction novel, in the vein of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*. Ammons narrates the story of the fire from the perspectives of many of the men who experienced it. They talk to each other, and their words are in quotes, but readers have to guess whether any of the quotes are drawn from historical sources.

Ammons's resulting book is an amazingly engaging narrative of the Granite Mountain disaster. He has studied drawings of the mine workings, developed a good understanding of mining technologies used in Butte in 1917, talked to recent miners who describe what it is like to work underground, researched city directories to know where miners working in the Granite Mountain Mine lived, and attended to numerous other research details; so his narrative conveys the gritty and harrowing immediacy in which men found themselves when they realized fire had broken out and they tried to stop it, when they realized they

were trapped in the mine, or later when they went into the mine to try to rescue survivors. Some of the miners who perished underground left notes for their loved ones, and Ammons imagines flesh to put on what little bones we have of their stories. The result is an excellent piece of writing that should be satisfying to most mining historians, even without footnotes and bibliography.

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Lorena Beniquez. *Lost Coal Country of Northeastern Pennsylvania*. (Images of Modern America Series.) Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2017; 95 pp., 144 color photos, paper, \$22.99. ISBN: 9781467126410

Author, photographer, videographer Lorena Beniquez brings to life the derelict, abandoned mining sites of northeastern Pennsylvania through a photographic journal kept over the last thirty years. Her book is part history, color photo journal, and a tour guide of a mining region that is now in decline, even dormant.

Beniquez is the great-granddaughter of a coal miner of the northeastern anthracite region. Several decades ago she set out to learn more about her family's history and its tie to the coal industry. With her camera at her side, Beniquez traveled to mining sites to capture the declining industry. Time passed and she returned to capture photographs as more sites were identified for demolition in environmental cleanup efforts or scraped for their metal. After capturing the Huber Coal Breaker the year before it was razed, she was troubled by the realization that only one breaker remained in the entire state. Thus, she focused her efforts on more research with plans for a documentary or a book.

The book is broken down into six sections that reflect interrelated industries tied to the mining industry. The first chapter features the St. Nicholas Coal Breaker, at the time of publica-

tion the last remaining breaker in Pennsylvania. Sadly, on March 15, 2018, the 1931 breaker came down in a controlled implosion. Beniquez' photographs capture the history of the site just before its demise.

The second section explores the history of the Huber Breaker in Ashley. Interviews with members of the Huber Breaker Preservation Society provide details about the buildings and their technological advances of a lost era.

Section three, "Killing the Canary," explores the Knox Mine disaster through story and photography of environmental scars left behind. Beniquez highlights the dangers of the industry and its many mining accidents in the region over the decades.

The next chapter explores the codependent existence between the railroad industry and mining as interpreted at the Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton. Railroads made possible the growth of industries like coal and steel.

In Chapter Five, the reader is introduced to Centralia, the abandoned borough that sits over an underground mine that has been burning for over fifty years.

In the final chapter, the author-photographer explores the lives of miners and coal patches in the preserved remains at Eckley Miners' Village Museum and Concrete City. The ninety-acre Eckley site depicts how miners and their families lived in the late 1800s, while Concrete City, "touted as an upscale version of the coal patch," depicts an architectural experiment gone awry.

The book is a haunting journey through a bygone era of Northeastern Pennsylvania's history. As the author revealed in an interview with Mary Therese Biebel of the Wilkes-Barre *Times Leader* in August of 2017: "It's important to remember the past, to commemorate the miners and honor them for what they endured." Through photography Beniquez leaves behind a testament to these men.

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