
Book Reviews

Steven J. Cary. *Accidental Argonaut: A Natural History of Winslow Howard*. Santa Fe: Metalmarker Press, 2020; 243 pp., 34 b&w illus., notes, bib., 2 append., paper, \$13.95. ISBN: 9780578531281

Some joined the western mineral rushes to strike it rich or to see the elephant, but others did so just to survive. Watchmaker and jeweler Winslow Howard, c. 1828-1898, was one of the latter.

Born and raised in New Hampshire, as an adolescent he was apprenticed as a watchmaker and jeweler with Tiffany and Company in New York City. Unfortunately, while developing his career with the firm, he contracted tuberculosis in his late twenties. Absent an understanding of its cause, still a generation away, the disease promised only a wasting death from “consumption.” The only possible mitigation of Howard’s condition lay in seeking “climate therapy” in the arid mountain West. His vocation naturally suggested doing so in a significant settlement in proximity to mining.

Howard’s first choice, Santa Fe, where he arrived in 1858, proved not entirely satisfactory. While the most important community in the region and thus the focus of much commerce, Santa Fe lay outside of the orbits of the mineral rushes that developed during that era in California, Colorado, and Montana. While medically exceptional, Howard in other ways was a typical nineteenth-century mining boomer. These people moved frequently seeking economic opportunity, many intending to return to the East if ever successful enough, although that option would be foreclosed to Howard by his illness.

Howard’s sojourn in Santa Fe had ended in his relocation to Denver in 1860 and within the year to Central City, Colorado. After the Civil War he sought prosperity in Helena, Montana in 1866 and 1867 before spending the 1870s in Del Norte, Colorado, and Prescott, Arizona, and most of the 1880s in Silver City, New Mexico, before retiring, temporarily, to San Diego, then moving to Globe, Arizona for the last two years of his life.

Howard did return to the East for a few years in the late 1860s. Having established himself well enough by then to afford a family, he returned to New Hampshire to marry Abbie Stratton in 1865. She remained in the East, however, while he pursued alternate opportunities in the East and West. They had daughters in 1867 and 1870 before Howard was forced west again by his health and perhaps his wanderlust and the couple’s temporary separations became permanent. Winslow and Abbie were not the only ones to wrestle with the problem of one party’s desire or need to remain in the West while the other did not wish to abandon family or familiarity in the East.

Howard also conformed to another boomer standard: earning one’s living by doing a little of this and a little of that. In 1879, Prescott’s *Arizona Miner* newspaper characterized him as a “jeweler, watch maker, assayer, geologist, entomologist and scientist generally.” Howard had learned assaying after arriving in the West as yet another means to supplement his income. Although he did make some money selling specimens of western fauna and flora to eastern collectors, including the Smithsonian, Howard’s entomology, was often more avocational. Cary, a western naturalist himself, is most interested in Howard’s enduring contributions to his era’s scientific understanding

of western wildlife.

Howard's interest in nature pre-dated his arrival in the West and, himself naturally curious, his western travels engulfed him in desert and alpine environments entirely unlike those of his native New England. He began to collect plant and animal specimens during his days in Santa Fe and continued to do so avidly through his years in Silver City. Four species would originally be named for Howard (with two later reclassified), including the moth *Daritis howardi* and the alpine forget-me-not *Eritrichium howardii*.

The author conveys a good understanding of the subjects and issues of the metal-mining West as they affected Howard, and of fortune seekers—economic or medicinal—like him. Chronicling someone not born into celebrity, Cary is forced to speculate about much of his subject's life and motives simply from an absence of information, little of which remains about average persons a century and more after their deaths.

From a historian's perspective, Cary occasionally errs in casting such surmises as fact—e.g., at the end of his life “Howard's mind often meandered back to his motives in coming West, usually concluding that he had done the right thing” (193). Historical support for these speculations about Howard's thoughts and feelings does not always appear in the relatively spare footnotes contained in the advance copy sent to the reviewer. Understood as such, however, Cary's conjectures never seem unreasonable.

In *Accidental Argonaut: A Natural History of Winslow Howard*, Steven Cary has produced a well-written and engaging biography about both a man and a type that readers of this journal should find interesting.

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Christian Wright. *Carbon County USA: Miners for Democracy in Utah and the West*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2019; 469 pp., 57 b&w illus., 10 tabl., 6 maps, 3 append., notes, bib., ind., cloth \$45, e-book \$36. ISBN: 9781607817314 (cloth), 9781607817246 (e-book).

Carbon County USA covers nearly one hundred years of coal mining labor history. It offers a superb overview of multiple boom and bust cycles in Utah coal mining country with its main emphasis on the labor history, particularly that of the United Mine Workers of America, although with a significantly broader information basis as well.

Chapter One focuses on the 1930s. While concentrated on developments in Utah, the coverage far exceeds that state's boundaries, regularly putting developments in Utah in the context of coal in the West and across the nation. This chapter sets the tone for much of the later book: an excellent set of highly individualized anecdotes illustrates the pre-union conditions in the coal mines: frequently stunningly rough, highly unsafe, and most unhealthy.

Particularly striking is the UMWA's concern about mine safety, combined with the very strong impression that mining companies had very little, if any, interest in safety. Similarly, the union focused on miners' living conditions, with, once again, the very strong impression that these was of no interest at all to the companies. Wright chronicles the utter sense of liberation, freedom gained, after the union countered the complete control of life by the companies. Even so, one of the major challenges, never satisfactorily overcome, was trying to organize the numerous, very small, mom-and-pop truck- and wagon-mines.

Chapter Two starts with a description of Utah Fuel's Sunnyside Mine explosion that killed twenty-three miners in 1945. This story provides a perfect introduction to an extensive discussion of the safety situation, rules and regulations, or lack