

Richard C. Huston. *A Gold Camp Called Summitville*. Lake City, CO: Western Reflections Publishing Company, 2012; 181 pp, b&w illus., notes, bib., ind., paper, \$16. ISBN: 9781937851019

Summitville is located in the rugged San Juan Mountains of Rio Grande County, Colorado, between 11,300 and 12,500 feet above sea level. Winters are hard and long here; it being said: "Don't sleep in on July Fourth because you might miss summer." In 121 years of mining, the Summitville district produced 552,439 troy ounces of gold, 752,700 troy ounces of silver, 1,018,297 pounds of copper, and 115,147 pounds of lead.

Despite being one of Colorado's major mining districts, no complete history of the district, from its beginnings in the 1870s to its disastrous closing in the 1990s, has been written. Richard C. Huston attempts to fill that void with his new book, *A Gold Camp Called Summitville*.

Huston is a logical choice to write about this subject. He writes: "I grew up in Monte Vista not far from Summitville and I remember neighbors and friends telling about life and times at Summitville." This is the author's second book about mining history in the San Juans, having written *A Silver Camp Called Creede* in 2005.

As in his previous book, Huston relies heavily upon passages taken from a variety of contemporary publications, including newspapers, mining engineering journals, state and federal government publications, contemporary books, and unpublished personal interviews. Huston's work is extensively footnoted and includes a complete bibliography.

The book starts with a prologue that includes a detailed description of the geology of Summitville and the Upper Alamosa River Basin. This section was reviewed by U.S. Geological Survey geologist Phil Bethke—to whom the book is dedicated—who played a significant role in studying the unusual geology of Summitville. The main

body of the book consists of six chapters covering the history of the district, from the discovery by five Union Army veterans of gold nuggets at the base of South Mountain in 1870, to the eventual bankruptcy of Galactic Resources, Ltd., in 1993 and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's designation of the area as a Superfund site.

Some of the most interesting material in this book derives from personal stories of life in and around the mines from people with whom the author corresponded or whom he interviewed. Raylene McWilliams Owens' family lived in the Summitville boarding house when she was a child and she recalled that "the cook at the boarding house on the other side of the valley was Grover Green who was an alcoholic. When he ran out of whiskey, he would drink the cooking vanilla. He made excellent chili." She went on to give his recipe so that everyone could try it for themselves. These stories are accompanied by numerous photographs, which greatly enhance the book. However, one or more detailed maps showing the location of mines, towns, and geographic features would have been helpful.

One item in the book does need to be clarified. Huston mentions that "in 1889 Summitville's population was twenty-five including three 'ladies of the evening.'" This intriguing statement is attributed to Muriel Sibell Wolle's book *Stampede to Timberline.*, but, the statement in Wolle's book is less surprising: in 1889, there were only "twenty five left in camp including three ladies."

Richard Huston has done a commendable job of compiling the facts and stories of Summitville. Anyone wishing to study the history of this fascinating mining district should begin the journey with this book.

Mark Vendl
Elgin, Illinois