

drove a hard bargain with Homestake, its corporate executives could not help liking Wilder, and the local community testified to his generosity.

Another important voice belongs to an unlikely mining man, Raymond Krause, who had been inspired when young by the first Earth Day celebration in 1970. He had served as a county planning director and dreamed “about how we’d make a better world.” He became Homestake’s environmental manager for the project and helped the mine to obtain the 327 permits needed to begin operations. He had the vision which transformed the McLaughlin Mine, after the gold was extracted, into the McLaughlin Natural Preserve, managed by the University of California, Davis.

A chorus of voices, including metallurgists and mechanical engineers, tell of the global effort to develop the autoclaves, the continuous-pressure oxidation system that beneficiated gold ore in compliance with environmental regulations. Although Homestake produced over a billion dollars in gold from the McLaughlin between 1985 and 2002, its profits proved negligible due to a huge capital investment, high operating costs, and the price of gold sometimes slumping below three hundred dollars per ounce.

Many women speak in these pages, including the office secretary at the mine, Marion Onstad, who encouraged women to apply for mining jobs and created a coloring book to teach children about the project. Another was a spokeswoman for the local Sierra Club chapter. A third was Sylvia Cranmer McLaughlin, wife of Homestake’s chairman of the board and founder of an early environmental group called Save San Francisco Bay.

One Shot for Gold is a kind of *Spoon River Anthology* without the remorse because it tells the redemptive story of how a historic mining company endeavored to sow grasslands even as it struggled to reap profits. Not lost in the story is how the families of Homestake workers made a lasting impact on towns near the mine by aiding community projects, sending kids to local schools, and simply being neighbors.

The people of the McLaughlin Mine are characters who found their author in Swent. She was born and raised in Homestake’s hometown of Lead, South Dakota, and lived for many years in mining communities. She is a past president of the Mining History Association and winner of the Rodman Paul Award for her contributions to mining history. In 1998 the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology awarded her an honorary doctorate.

One Shot for Gold is right on target. Swent wastes no words in telling the McLaughlin Mine’s story. She repeats a phrase only when offering a useful reminder. Over about two hundred pages, she tells the story with dispatch, with the deliberate haste of a business enterprise and the clarity of a gifted historian. Having visited the McLaughlin Mine repeatedly herself and having worked with these materials for decades, Swent had one shot to tell this story. She hit a bullseye.

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Priscilla Wegars. *Polly Bemis, The Life and Times of a Chinese American Pioneer*. (Asian American Comparative Collection Research Report, No. 5.) Caldwell, ID: Caxton Press, 2020; 556 pp., 134 b&w illus., 10 maps, append., notes, bib., ind., paper, \$29.95. ISBN: 9780870046407

Polly Bemis was a legendary figure in the history of the Warren, Idaho, mining district. Well-known among the tellers of local tales, her story reached a wider audience with the 1981 publication of Ruthanne Lum McCunn’s biographical novel *Thousand Pieces of Gold*, and an award-winning 1990 film of the same name. Priscilla Wegars’ comprehensive study of this extraordinary Chinese immigrant is equally award-winning. The Mining History Association awarded it the Mary Lee Spence Documentary Book Award for 2019-2020.

Wegars is a prominent archaeologist and his-

torian who established the University of Idaho's Asian American Collection and has written widely about the Chinese and Japanese in the American West of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She prepared this study under a grant from the Idaho Humanities Council to investigate the facts behind Polly's legend. Wegars also obtained a grant from the University of Idaho's John Calhoun Smith Memorial Fund to study Polly's husband, Charlie Bemis. Primary sources for this study include, but are not limited to, contemporary newspaper articles, deeds, tax assessments, and censuses, as well as the diaries of neighbor Charlie Shepp from 1902 to 1933. The depth of Wegars' research, and the inclusion of extensive quotes from this material, makes this the most comprehensive study of this unique woman's life.

Polly Bemis was born Lalu Nathu (or Hathu) among the Daur people near today's Beijing. When she was nineteen years old, her father sold her into slavery to buy food and seed for the rest of her family. In 1872, on behalf of a wealthy Chinese merchant who had purchased her for \$2,500 to serve as his concubine, her buyer took her to Portland, Oregon, and Lewiston, Idaho, then on to Warren, Idaho, via pack train. This merchant left Warren sometime between 1874 and 1880, leaving Polly free to fend for herself.

The Warren Mining District was established in 1862 and stretched for about sixteen miles along Warren Creek. At the time that Polly arrived, about four hundred Chinese and two hun-

dred Euro-Americans lived in the mining camp. Besides owning several claims, Charlie Bemis owned an arrastra mill and a saloon; Polly ran a boarding house and washed miners' clothing. The couple enjoyed a close relationship and were married in 1894 when miscegenation laws were relaxed in Idaho. In 1901, they moved seventeen miles to a mining claim on the Salmon River near Polly Creek, where they sold produce, eggs, and dairy products to nearby miners. Charlie died in 1922 and Polly in 1933.

The couple, especially Polly, was greatly loved by their neighbors. Her work ethic, cheerfulness, sense of humor, and generosity earned her accolades from the Euro-American population, which was not always tolerant of other Chinese. A substantial mythology about Polly evolved, one that emphasized the harshness of her early life and her rise to the status of an honored Idaho pioneer.

Wegars' book about Polly dispels several legends promulgated by the biographical novel and film that celebrated her life. Through her meticulous documentation, Wegars convincingly proves, among other things, that Polly was not a prostitute, nor did Charlie Bemis win her in a poker game. This book is highly recommended for anyone interested in mining camp and farming life in the Pacific Northwest, the Chinese experience in America, gender studies, and the deconstruction of the American western myth.

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