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## Book Reviews

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David Forsyth. *Eben Smith: The Dean of Western Mining*. (Mining the American West.) Louisville: University Press of Colorado, 2021; 208 pp., 28 b&w illus., notes, bib., ind., cloth, \$32. ISBN: 9781646421787.

During his active lifetime in the mining industry Eben Smith was well known throughout Colorado. However, today the name Eben Smith is unknown to most Colorado residents. Nearly every Colorado resident has heard of Horace Tabor, a few people may recognize the last name of David Moffat, mainly because of the long railroad tunnel named for him driven through the Front Range west of Denver.

David Forsyth has assembled a very detailed account of Smith's life and his involvement in developing the mining industry of Colorado. In addition to researching materials from libraries and historical societies, the author assessed personal letters and photographs from Smith family sources. This is a well-written and well-documented addition to the mining history of Colorado.

Eben Smith could be described as a strong-willed, intelligent person who was highly driven to succeed. He was a self-made, practical man with a minimal formal education, who was able to get ahead using his own strengths. Even during his career, he was little known by Colorado citizens, as he tended to avoid the public eye and concentrated on managing his mining interests.

Smith was born on 17 December 1831 near Erie, Pennsylvania. His parents and forefathers were of Scotch-Irish ancestry, and most were and had been farmers. He apparently attended local Erie schools and had some training as a ship's carpenter. After gold was discovered in California in 1848, the mass migration began of those seek-

ing their fortunes. Smith was no different, and he left Pennsylvania and traveled via Panama to San Francisco, arriving in 1851. He first moved to Grass Valley and engaged in placer mining, later moving several times until he ended up in Placer County, helping to build and later working at a local stamp mill.

In 1852 he married Caroline Jordan, a widow with four children. The couple moved to Grass Valley, where Smith was moving upward in mining circles by purchasing and operating mining properties. In 1859, while on a trip to St. Joseph, Missouri, Smith became acquainted with Jerome Chaffee, a local banker. The two decided to join forces by purchasing a twelve-stamp mill and moving it to the Central City, Colorado, area.

By late 1860, this gold milling operation had become a financial success. At the same time, Smith and Chaffee also were mining on the Gregory and Bobtail lodes. In 1865 Chaffee became involved in organizing the banking house of Clark and Gruber, where Smith met David Moffat, a clerk at the bank. Smith and Moffat became fast friends and ultimately business associates for many years. Although Chaffee continued to invest in mining ventures, he became more involved in politics, ultimately becoming a U.S. senator for Colorado.

Smith and Caroline divorced in 1864, possibly because of Smith being too busy with his business activities. Smith spent much of his time expanding his interests in other business concerns: building and operating a theater, organizing a wagon road, banking, and as Central City's postmaster. Smith and Chaffee continued their mining project association by building milling and smelting works in Georgetown, Alma, and Central City. Smith married his second wife, Emily, in 1866, and built

a home in Central City later that year. They had two daughters and one son, but their first child, Kathy, died when thirteen months old.

In 1876 Chaffee and David Moffat gained control of the defunct Caribou silver mine north of Nederland, Colorado. They appointed Smith as superintendent, and he immediately improved mining and milling operations and put the mine on a sound financial basis. In 1879 the mine was sold to new owners, but Smith stayed on as superintendent. At the time he was living in Boulder. He was appointed a Boulder County commissioner in 1877.

Smith remained at the Caribou until, in 1882, he decided to take a position as manager for Chaffee and Horace Tabor at the new Tam O'Shanter Mine at Ashcroft, near Aspen, in Pitkin County. The mine was a bust, as the ore was low grade and did not extend to any depth. Following the Ashcroft bust, Moffat hired Smith in 1884 to manage Moffat's Leadville operations. While there Smith successfully managed and invested in local operations including the Maid of Erin, Wolfstone, Ibex, and Gray Eagle.

Smith made a fortune from these investments. He also expanded his mining interests into the Aspen district and explored mining opportunities in the Creede district that failed to pan out. Following the death of Jerome Chaffee in March 1886, Smith became Moffat's go-to mining expert. By 1892 Smith had become one of Colorado's foremost mining engineers, even without a formal education. He had a developed sense for when a mine would be successful.

Following the collapse of the price of silver 1893, Smith and Moffat set their sights on gold-mining operations in the Cripple Creek District. There, Smith, sometimes with Moffat, began investing in and controlling gold mines, two of the most important being the Victor and the Anaconda. The problem of shipping mined ore to a smelter prompted Smith, Moffat, and others to organize a narrow-gauge railroad from the district to Florence. Completed in 1894, this railroad was

finished at about the same time that district experienced its first serious labor trouble between the newly formed Western Federation of Miners and local mine owners.

For the next ten years this labor conflict centered on three main problems: basic pay of three dollars per day for all underground workers, an eight-hour workday, and recognizing of the union as a bargaining agent for the miners. Smith and Moffat continued to invest in Leadville and Cripple Creek mines, although many of their properties were producing lower-grade ores and lower tonnages. Smith continued to be active, investigating potential mines in Mexico, Oregon, and Utah, some of which he developed while others he rejected.

Labor strife with the WFM erupted in Leadville in 1896. Smith and other Leadville managers formed the Colorado Mine Owners' Association as an organization to deal with the WFM's demands. There followed a long a painful strike in the mining industry, with most mines closed for many months. Meanwhile, in 1895 Smith and five others had formed the Denver Mine and Smelter Supply Company and he had moved to Denver. Smith sold his interest in that company in 1901, along with divesting himself of most of his other mining assets.

The author details many of Smith's financial dealings and manipulations in buying and selling interests in numerous mines over the years. Smith's primary money-making operations were in Leadville and Cripple Creek. Eben Smith died on 5 November 1906 after a two-day bout of appendicitis, the same illness that killed Horace Tabor seven years earlier.

Eben Smith was unquestionably a giant of nineteenth-century mining in Colorado, and as a knowledgeable mining man was head and shoulders above better-known individuals such as Horace Tabor, Jerome Chaffee, or David Moffat. These three were primarily mining investors, but Smith was also a practical mining man. This book would be a valuable addition to the library of any

mining historian.

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Alan J. M. Noonan. **Mining Irish-American Lives: Western Communities from 1849 to 1920.** (Mining the American West.) Louisville: University Press of Colorado, 2022; 377 pp., 18 b&w illus., 14 tables., 3 append., notes, bib., ind. cloth, \$53. ISBN: 9781646422500.

Readers of this journal will be familiar with the University Press of Colorado's monograph series, *Mining the American West*. The series has a wide scope and has contributed much to our understanding of mining throughout the American West. Alan Noonan's *Mining Irish-American Lives* is a worthy addition to this series.

Noonan takes up numerous important questions that overlap and fall into several areas of scholarship, primarily mining history and the history of the Irish in the United States. Noonan also covers a long period—from the California Gold Rush to 1920—as well as covering a large geographic area—his West is very inclusive of mining areas. The presence of Irish-born and Irish-American miners in the West (and in other mining areas) has been noted before. Generally, these have been studies of specific areas, like David Emmons on Butte, Montana, and Ron James on Nevada, to mention two. Noonan expands the scope and shows that there was a strong and significant Irish presence generally throughout mining areas in the West from their very beginning in California. The book will provide a useful context and base for those looking at particular communities or types of mines.

Noonan also weighs in on questions surrounding Irish acceptance in the United States and the unskilled nature of Irish immigrants. Multiple studies of Irish in mining have demonstrated that in mining a large percentage of Irish were skilled, having worked as miners in Ireland. Noonan shows that the Irish were generally welcomed in

mining communities and did not face the opposition and discrimination that was common in the Northeast and Midwest. The number of communities he examines makes this an especially significant finding.

Irish-born and Irish American can be deceptively simple terms and Chapter One discusses the varieties of identity incorporated in those terms in an effective and nuanced way. Those in mining communities were Catholic and Protestant, and while many had been born in the United States of Irish parents, others had come from Ireland, often directly to a mining area. Noonan also shows that mobility was a significant part of the lives of Irish miners, who moved from mining area to mining area to follow opportunities. In this they were no different than miners from other ethnic groups but shared this and many other common characteristics of miners and the communities in which they lived. Noonan is very familiar with the more general literature on Irish identities and the Irish in the United States and draws on that very effectively to limn the nature of the people he is focusing on and how they saw themselves and were seen by the larger society.

The following chapters trace the development of western mining from the California Gold Rush through the various mining areas that developed as the West was explored and developed. While his focus is on the role that Irish and Irish-American miners and entrepreneurs played, Noonan never loses sight of the diversity of mining communities and the diversity within the Irish community in each. He also adds to the growing literature on the Irish in the West that demonstrates that their experience in terms of acceptance into the community was quite different than it was for those who settled on the East Coast or in the Midwest.

One of the strengths of *Mining Irish-American Lives* is its strong statistical foundation based on the U.S. Census. Noonan has a solid grasp of the size of each community and its demographic characteristics. He is able to distinguish between Irish-born and second- or later-generation Irish