

while others are devoted to the gravel works, lime works, the Ladd Manganese Mine, clay mining for pottery, and sand mining for glass manufacturing.

Unfortunately, from a mining history perspective, essentially no information is given about the actual mining of these latter products, though the book does give coal, sand, gravel, brick, and manganese production figures. The authors do appropriately single out Tesla's importance in developing coal briquetting in the U.S., and support their case with multiple references to the technical literature of the time. Another nice touch is the identification of a number of extant buildings, notably in Stockton, San Francisco, Oakland, and L.A., that include clay products manufactured at Tesla, a nice testimonial to the people of a dead and largely forgotten town.

The book does not have footnotes, but does have an extensive bibliography and for most topics it is very straightforward to identify sources. The book is fluidly written and enjoyable, with very few typos or errors. Particularly interesting and enlightening are the numerous advertisements interspersed throughout the volume from the regional press (e.g. for Tesla coal). These are fun, but also valuable in providing insight into the use and price of coal at the time in the Bay Area and its surroundings. A list of the numerous illustrations would have been helpful, even though long. Presumably cost concerns prevented the use of a better quality paper for the photographs.

The focus of the book is clearly and unambiguously the history of the town, but broader aspects of western development are raised, at least implicitly. As mentioned earlier, the book presents a beautiful example of the intertwined development of coal mining and railroading, and it gives a superb account of infighting between railroad developers when discussing how the Union Pacific tried to prevent competition by relentlessly interfering with the construction of

a Western Pacific connection to Stockton. Tesla's infrastructure, like that of so many coal mining towns, was built by, or at least with major help from, the coal company. Some painful, if typical, examples of discrimination against Asian laborers are briefly mentioned. The critical importance of fires in Tesla's history, and especially in its demise, is very well documented.

Particularly noteworthy is that Tesla coal mining was largely destroyed by competition from southern California oil, a fuel switch that affected coal mining nationwide and worldwide half a century later. Chapters on the failure of the California Safe Deposit and Trust Company summarize with impressive clarity an astoundingly complex financial misadventure and its consequences for Tesla and San Francisco. Tesla is also an interesting case example of how a fortune won in one mining enterprise—Alaska gold mining—was lost in another.

From a mining history point of view, some unfortunate omissions occur. No information is given about how shafts were sunk, or how "tunnels" were driven. Diagrams of mine layouts and geology are beautiful and clear, but seem rather schematic. But this unquestionably "local history," with occasionally excruciating detail, more than adequately recognizes a broader context, and was written with obvious love, care, and regret. It is informative, instructive, enjoyable, and delightful.

Jaak Daemen

University of Nevada, Reno

Dan Plazak. *A Hole in the Ground with a Liar at the Top: Fraud and Deceit in the Golden Age of American Mining*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006; 288pp., illus., cloth, \$26.95.

The sixth century B.C. Chinese philosopher Lao-tsu wrote, "there is no grater disaster than greed." Geologist and engineer Dan Plazak con-

firms it in his book, *A Hole in the Ground with a Liar at the Top*, with a subtitle that explains it all: *Fraud and Deceit in the Golden Age of American Mining*.

Plazak takes his book title from a saying attributed to that famous Nevada miner Mark Twain, and, even if Twain never said it, proved true far too often. It is truly amazing how naive and greedy a human being can be. The author might have just as easily titled this volume “fools and frauds” or “gullibility, greed, and gold.”

This is a litany of stories of how people were separated from their money in huge numbers in the nineteenth century. But it was a pattern that did not end in the twentieth century and, no doubt, will be a feature in the twenty-first. The schemes and schemers were legendary in the mining West and, for that matter, throughout the country.

The well-known mines and individuals, such as Utah's Emma Mine, Wyoming and Colorado's Diamond hoax, Death Valley Scotty, and George Graham Rice, take bows. So do such major mining districts as Nevada's Comstock and Colorado's Leadville. In Saratoga County, New York, mining gold from seawater or sands defrauded others.

Separating folks from their money became a game indulged in by a wide variety of people. Even Mark Twain joined the parade by puffing mining properties while accepting shares in return. He ventured to say he could make twenty thousand dollars a year doing what he called in public a “friendly custom.” In private he called it “blackmail” (21).

Chapter 1, “Introduction to Mining Fraud,” should be read by everyone, whether they are into mining history or not, and certainly if they are thinking of taking a “flier” on some unknown mining stock. From that point on, this solidly-researched, well-written volume takes the reader through hilarious, sad, amazing, and tragic stories, as the investor and his or her money are parted in prodigious ways, limited only by the

seller's imagination and the buyer's gullibility. Plazak's volume adds much to mining history and is a classic affirmation of that old proverb, “Let the buyer beware.”

Duane A. Smith
Fort Lewis College

Christian J. Buys. *The Lost Journals of Charles S. Armstrong: From Arkport, New York to Aspen, Colorado, 1867-1894*. Montrose, CO: Western Reflections Publishing Co., 2002; 243 pp., map, illus., bib., ind., paper, \$12.95.

Diaries or journals of early Colorado pioneers are rare. Individual letters covering a limited span of years can be found, but there are few complete journals documenting a person's life over decades. Christian Buys managed to locate one such original diary in a private collection, and later found a transcription of it in Aspen. Reading the papers of a person long dead can give the reader an eerie connection with that person; one can almost feel like one knows him. Buys brings out the connection he gained with Charles Armstrong in a way that can be felt by the reader.

Charles Armstrong was born in Arkport, New York, in 1847. His diary entries started at age 19, in 1867. Armstrong's diary entries reflect a mundane life in western New York state, and this was no doubt the primary reason he decided to head west in 1880. By May 1880, he was in Aspen. His writings on his experiences there are those of a young man caught up in the excitement of living on the edge of a wilderness amid a grand landscape, and seeing opportunities to take part in the mining boom then underway around Aspen. In the late 1880s, Armstrong spent a great deal of time prospecting and staking claims in the area. The information Armstrong recorded about his prospecting is quite informative and is the most important part of his journal.