

Marguerite Sprague. *Bodie's Gold: Tall Tales and True History From a California Mining Town*. Reno, University of Nevada Press, 2003; 264 pp., 7x10 in., 77 b/w photos, 1 map, bib., ind., cloth, \$34.95.

James Williams. *Fugitive Slave in the Gold Rush: Life and Adventures of James Williams*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002; introduction by Malcolm J. Rohrbough. 119 pp., 5x8 in., ind., paper, \$16.95.

California's complex minority history continues to attract both academic and popular interest, as exemplified by these two books on widely divergent mining-related topics. Beginning with a childhood visit to Bodie, accompanied by an uncle who once lived there, the author of *Bodie's Gold* expands what started as a family memoir turned into an entertaining social history highlighting the local Paiute/Shoshoni tribe and other peripheral communities and people that have always been associated with mining camp life in the American West.

Starting in the late 1850s as the rush to California spread outward, Bodie's placer days quickly gave way to hardrock mining. After a brief heyday in the late 1870s and early 1880s, the town declined rapidly, as did thousands of other one-industry towns in the American West. It never returned to prosperity, despite brief bouts of intermittent mining until World War II. Lode gold or the hope of finding it was always the big attraction, even though silver was a major byproduct. But unlike many dead and long-forgotten mining towns, Bodie has an afterlife that keeps it in "arrested decay"—Park Service jargon for preservation without restoration. Since 1962 it has been an "official" ghost town protected by rangers of the California State Park system. The popularity of this remote and lonely place, accessible only after a bumpy ride on a long dirt road, was demonstrated in the early 1990s after Galactic Resources, Ltd.,—the same Canadian firm that left a notorious mining legacy at

Summitville, Colorado—proposed a large open pit operation on claims less than a mile from the historic town. Public outcry and intensive lobbying by a coalition of environmental and preservation organizations stopped further mining plans and led to an eventual, and perhaps inevitable, buyout and incorporation of Galactic's holdings into Bodie State Park.

Despite the title this is not a mining history, and thankfully was not intended as such. The few paragraphs and photos that focus on mining and milling technology should have been proofed for errors of fact and interpretation. But as social history this book is fascinating. Author Marguerite Sprague explores local legends and lore in a lively text filled with colorful vignettes and sidebar anecdotes. What emerges is a flavor of the times, an up-close-and-personal portrait of miners and merchants, the respected and the underclass along with their families and friends, observed during Bodie's heyday and through its long decline. Mining hazards are vividly recounted. One considerate miner's shout down a shaft to "look out below" as he was falling 450 feet to his death lives on in Bodie lore. Town life was also hazardous for minorities and those venturing into dangerous districts in the boom years, with outlaws looking for easy victims but killing each other at a higher rate than other mining camps of the era. The roughs generally avoided well-armed Anglo-Europeans, however, who occasionally took the law into their own hands.

In contrast to the regional history of a single mining camp, *Fugitive Slave* is the singular history of one lonely African-American trying to make his way in a hostile Anglo-American culture. As part of the postmodern trend to rewrite western American history from the bottom up, the University of Nebraska Press reprinted this autobiography of an escaped slave who fled to California just as the Gold Rush was winding down. First published in 1873, this intriguing little book is not about mining per se. Only about ten

pages of the text are devoted to personal mining experiences, although the narrator, a visitor and town lot speculator in Virginia City among a variety of other occupations, adds an anecdotal, second-hand description of the Yellow Jacket mine fire on the Comstock. But as historian Malcolm Rohrbough notes in his scholarly introduction, the importance of this short narrative rests on its rarity as one of only a handful of eyewitness accounts of the Gold Rush era written from an African-American perspective. As an artful survivor of antebellum plantation culture, Williams tells a compelling story of how a member of the social underclass struggled to overcome tremendous odds in a society built on the cultural bedrock of white supremacy. His commentary on a wide range of contemporary topics and personalities make rewarding reading for anyone interested in nineteenth-century minority studies.

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Nancy J. Taniguchi. *Castle Valley America: Hard Land, Hard-Won Home*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2004; 365pp., cloth \$45.95, paper \$24.95.

Historian Nancy Taniguchi calls Utah's Castle Valley "home," and sets out to portray it "with all its defects and wrinkles and still reveal why it's so special [viii]." She reveals that Castle Valley's specialness is a result of its unique physical geography and its intense human history. Geology plays a special role here, as the valley is flanked by rugged cliffs containing deposits of bituminous coal and other hydrocarbons. The valley's aridity made it difficult to settle, but agriculture got a start here when Mormons moved into the area in the late nineteenth century. This tension between industrial-mining history and agricultural self-sufficiency has positioned Castle Valley center stage in a drama repeated elsewhere. The recurring tension between Mormons and outside corporate interests vividly plays out in Castle Valley,

and Taniguchi portrays the drama with considerable objectivity. What makes this book so special is that it is a tribute to Castle Valley's unique local history, but reveals, at every turn, how that history was affected by broader national and international developments. This, in other words, is local history in broader context.

Readers of our *Mining History Journal* will want to know how Taniguchi treats mining history. Castle Valley's hydrocarbon deposits are covered in various chapters that are arranged chronologically. Taniguchi discusses the mining of coal from several perspectives, observing that numerous players had a role: independent and family mines, the Mormon Church, eastern mining companies, and especially the region's railroads. As with so much of mining history, transportation is a factor that can make the difference between profit and loss. She rightly notes that the valley's geographic position was extremely important, for it was once peripheral or isolated, but then boomed after the Denver & Rio Grande Western railway built through the valley on its way from the Mile High City to Salt Lake City. Taniguchi also notes that other hydrocarbons like gilsonite (a very rare, asphalt-like mineral so valuable that it was shipped in sacks rather than in bulk), oil, and natural gases (including carbon dioxide) were produced here at times. It was, however, bituminous coal that fueled most of Castle Valley's development, and coal comprises the bulk of the story.

Using a remarkably "symmetrical" outline of three sections, each consisting of four chapters, Taniguchi relates the valley's history from 1776 to 2004. Ending in 1899, the first section interprets the valley's setting, Native American, early Spanish and Mormon pioneers, and the coming of the railroad. The second section ("New People, New Ways") emphasizes the increasing ethnic diversity from 1899 to the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929. The last section addresses the theme of "Crisis and Community," showing how the Depression and the Cold War affected the valley, while more recently