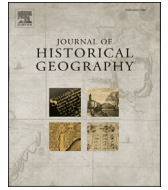




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Review

Arn Keeling and John Sandlos (Eds), *Mining and Communities in Northern Canada: History, Politics, and Memory*. Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 2015, xiv + 456 pages, US\$39.95 paperback

Arn Keeling and John Sandlos' *Mining and Communities: History, Politics, and Memory* consists of a collection of case studies written by researchers and community partners who participated in 'Abandoned Mines in Northern Canada', a project documenting legacies of mineral development in northern Aboriginal communities. It broadly argues that twentieth-century promises of progress through mining development in the north "frequently delivered only ephemeral benefits, while leaving behind lingering social and environmental problems" (p. 4). Keeling and Sandlos pull important insights out of the diverse case studies presented in this volume, and pose important questions for future northern/mining scholarship.

The introduction does a considerable amount of heavy lifting, providing the necessary historical context and methodological/theoretical framework, including a lengthy discussion of the contributors' reliance on oral evidence. Keeling and Sandlos organised *Mining and Communities* into three major parts: memory, policy, and closure. In practice the boundaries between these three parts blur considerably. This overlap makes a thematic reading difficult. Even though most of the articles make sense read independently, Canadian mining scholars and anyone studying extractive industry generally will certainly want to read this book cover to cover.

Part one is organized around mining and memory in indigenous communities. The essays in this section rely heavily on oral evidence. One of the best pieces here is Sarah Gordon's 'Narratives Unearthed, or, How an Abandoned Mine Doesn't Really Abandon You.' As part of her discussion of the environmental and social impacts of Port Radium mine, Gordon exposes contradictions between Dene and newcomer discovery narratives. While the Dene claim that knowledge of pitchblende was passed down by elders over time, popular colonial narratives credit prospector Gilbert Labine with the discovery. The Labine myth is one of many examples of First Nations erasure from celebratory discovery narratives often, as Gordon points out, invented and publicised by mining companies seeking investment. Gordon's piece shows how stories can function to erase indigenous communities while reinforcing the corporate claims to valuable mining land.

Part two of *Mining and Communities* shifts focus to the institutional relationship between governments, mining companies, and indigenous people. The authors in this section collectively survey the various ways mining gets justified despite demonstrable historic repetition of environmental destruction, human exploitation, and boom/bust cycles. Of particular note are Hereward Longley's article 'Indigenous Battles for Environmental Protection and Economic Benefits during the Commercialization of the Alberta Oil

Sands, 1967–1986' and Tyler Levitan and Emilie Cameron's 'Privatizing Consent? Impact and Benefit Agreements and the Neoliberalization of Mineral Development in the Canadian North.' Longley's piece reflects on the effectiveness of multi-community organisation under the threat of oil development in Alberta. Levitan and Cameron put Impact Benefit Agreements under the microscope to examine their actual ability to protect the interests of local people. Although the contributors stop (just) short of making policy recommendations themselves, the potentially useful links to modern decision-making are rampant.

Part three (closure) is the shortest, with only three submissions. Heather Green's essay 'There Is No Memory of It Here: Closure and Memory of the Polaris Mine in Resolute Bay, 1973–2012' stands out. Green documents a dearth of memories about Polaris Mine, negative or positive. Her piece serves to emphasize the fact that mining history is rarely a simple story of exploitative mining company versus vulnerable local community. She powerfully challenges the idea that every interaction between mining company and community is necessarily traumatic or pivotal to a community's history.

Lest the reader finish Green's essay with the impression that mining history might not be important after all, the last essay in the third section (Kevin O'Reilly 'Liability, Legacy, and Perpetual Care: Government Ownership and Management of the Giant Mine, 1999–2015') slams home a sense of urgency for understanding mining and communities. The sheer scale of human and environmental injustice at Giant Mine (necessitating perpetual care by the Canadian public) underscores this collection's strongest central themes: that mining haunts communities long after production stops. Unlike other authors, O'Reilly has no qualms about making recommendations for the future, and his refreshingly direct commentary is based on his extensive personal experience with northern mineral development.

If there is one shortcoming in *Mining and Communities* it is a general lack of discussion of the climatic and geological variances between study areas. The result is that the Canadian north feels like a single homogenous region and the case studies sometimes feel microscopic or repetitive. Additionally, although the variety of contributor backgrounds decidedly strengthens this book, disciplinary, political, and personal perspectives are not always easily deciphered within the text. A careful reading of the 'Notes on Contributors' is absolutely essential for a proper critical reading of many of the essays.

Nevertheless, *Mining and Communities* contributes some major insights to the study of mining. This book acts as a long over-due check on oversimplified narratives of exploitation and declension in mining regions. Perhaps its most important insight is the dualism of northerners' experiences: people '[critique] the colonialism and environmental degradation that were invariably tied to mining on the one hand, but minutes later [express] pride in their work and nostalgia for the good old mining days' (p. 11).

Such seemingly contradictory ways of viewing the past are not mutually exclusive, and must be balanced carefully by First Nations, resource development, and northern scholars.

The refreshing variety of disciplines and career stages represented in this collection suggests a revival of mining scholarship is well underway in Canada. This book provokes big questions to stimulate future study. As researchers, how do we reconcile the history of indigenous resistance and resilience with the perceived benefits in income and employment brought by mining interests (p. 10)? As Keeling and Sandlos state in their conclusion, “extractive sites ... must ultimately decline,” often bringing environmental

and social declension with them (p. 380). Yet, given the mixed legacy of abandoned mines, is extractive history necessarily declensionist? At a time when mining companies mired in scandal increasingly market their work as socially and environmentally responsible, *Mining and Communities* provides new tools and insights for coming to terms with the past, present, and future of northern mineral development.

Mica Jorgenson
McMaster University, Canada