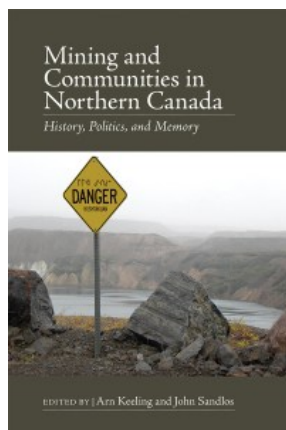


REVIEW: *MINING AND
COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN
CANADA*

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Arn Keeling and John Sandlos, eds., *Mining and Communities in Northern Canada: History, Politics, and Memory*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2015. 456 pgs, ISBN 9781552388044. Available for free download [here](#).

In his book on American mining towns, *Hard as the Rock Itself*, David Robertson argues that mining histories overwhelmingly fail to address the persistence and resilience of post-mining communities.¹ That is, mining historians have focused primarily on the economics of extraction, tending to begin their study when a mine opens and end it when the mine closes. Refreshingly, recent mining histories have begun to examine both the persistence of post-mining communities and the environmental transformations that continue to manifest after mining ends.² Intertwining historical research with an impressive collection of oral histories, *Mining and Communities in Northern Canada* successfully amplifies the voices of First Nations communities that have been routinely left voiceless in mining history and in policy decisions regarding mineral exploration and development.

Organized as a collection of twelve case studies, *Mining and Communities in Northern Canada* draws on research conducted from the “Abandoned Mines in Northern Canada” project led by editors Arn Keeling and John Sandlos at Memorial University. It is divided into three sections: “Mining and Memory;” “History, Politics and Mining Policy;” and “Navigating Mine Closure.” The case studies by established scholars and graduate students cover an impressive

topical and temporal span of extractive industries in Canada's North, including surface bitumen mining, underground lead-zinc, nickel, silver, and radium mines, and open-pit gold and iron ore mining, industrial endeavors that have operated from 1913 to today. It is also important to note that the authors conducted field-based research, allowing them to engage with the communities and the remote post-mining landscapes they were studying, providing them with a unique perspective they would not have gained by relying solely on archival material.

The case studies in *Mining and Communities in Northern Canada* engage with a number of pressing contemporary global issues, including the lasting influence of colonialism, dispossession and toxic exposure from industrial development that continues to affect First Nations communities, as well as the ongoing global struggle to reckon the economic benefits of mining with its lasting environmental costs. As Keeling and Sandlos highlight in the book's introduction, the economic volatility that defines the mining industry has disproportionately affected remote mineral-dependent communities. Much historical research focused on these post-mining or deindustrialized communities has explored only company towns and planned mining communities, populations that existed because of an industry or a mine. Thankfully, the case studies in this book stray from this model, and instead use ethnographic methods to examine the historical and ongoing challenges faced by First Nations communities whose ancestral lands were subjected to mineral development, extraction, and abandonment.

The chapters in *Mining and Communities in Northern Canada* make many important contributions to our understanding of the

resilience of post-industrial communities, political ecology, extractive economies, and environmental justice. Of the many important themes discussed in the book, I will highlight three that I found to be the most illuminating, all of which emphasize the myriad experiences that individuals faced living within these landscapes. First, the authors highlight the diversity of roles played by First Nations' community members, from contesting mineral development and mine closure, to working within the mines, and finally acting as guardians in post-mining maintenance. Second, the oral histories generated from the authors' interviews provide a unique window into the personal experiences of First Nations community members who live within these post-mining landscapes. A final important theme that runs throughout the book addresses the mixed memories and conflicted histories related to mineral development that individuals who live within these post-mining landscapes contend with, as seen in Keeling and Patricia Boulter's chapter on Rankin Inlet and Jean-Sébastien Boutet's chapter on the Labrador Trough, as well as in the ethnographic material presented in Sarah Gordon's chapter on Port Radium, Sandlos's chapter on Pine Point, and Heather Green's chapter on Resolute. The case studies in *Mining and Communities in Northern Canada* show that the collective memory of these post-mining communities is multifaceted: some reflect the pain of mine closure and abandonment, while others reflect the positive memories of working within a mine and the economic benefits that mine employment yielded.

Owing to the vast spatial extent that this book covers, along with the subject matter covering an industry known for its tremendous

environmental footprint, I would have liked to see more vivid illustrations of the mine workings themselves. A number of chapters are void of either maps or photographs of the landscapes they describe. However, many of the chapters include well-drawn overview maps of the mine locations, which help readers situate where these places are located. The excellent contemporary landscape photographs taken by Boutet and Sandlos depict the dramatic landscape transformations produced from these mines. Furthermore, the inclusion of photographs of mine workers and interviewees, such as Herman Melancon in Alexander Winton and Joella Hogan's chapter on the Keno Hill mine, augments the ethnographic material presented. The editors' insertion of a glossary of mining terms at the beginning of the book was a thoughtful addition for readers not fluent in mining jargon.

Mining and Communities in Northern Canada is an important collection of meaningful scholarship, and its success beckons for further historical and ethnographic studies of the challenges faced by indigenous communities with mineral development and closure. Its case studies provide an historic context to the effects of industrialization and abandonment on mineral-dependent communities, research that should influence contemporary policy decisions regarding mining in Canada and elsewhere. Thus, this is a welcome addition to the field of environmental history, applied anthropology, and historical geography, and should serve as a jumping-off point for future studies exploring the historical negotiations between indigenous communities, mining companies, policy makers, and the broader political ecology of remote resource extraction.

John Baeten is a research associate and instructor in the Department of Social Sciences at Michigan Technological University where he recently earned his PhD in Industrial Heritage and Archaeology. John's research is focused on post-extractive landscapes, at the intersection of industrial heritage, environmental history and historical geography. An industrial archaeologist, John's recent research explores the landscape-scale effects of iron mining in the Lake Superior basin. He is particularly interested in how communities have responded to the environmental impacts of past industrial processes, and how these environmental legacies have been either memorialized or avoided in a heritage context.

¹ David Robertson, *Hard as the Rock Itself: Place and Identity in the American Mining Town* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2006).

² For example, see Nancy Langston, *Sustaining Lake Superior: An Extraordinary Lake in a Changing World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017); J.R. McNeill and George Vrtis (eds.), *Mining North America: An Environmental History since 1522* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); Jessica Van Horssen, *A Town Called Asbestos: Environmental Contamination, Health, and Resilience in a Resource Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016); Jeff Manuel, *Taconite Dreams: The Struggle to Sustain Mining on Minnesota's Iron Range, 1915-2000* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Kent Curtis, *Gambling on Ore: The Nature of Metal Mining in the United States, 1860-1910* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2013); and Timothy LeCain, *Mass Destruction: The Men and the Giant Mines that Wired America and Scarred the Plant* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009).