

#### BOOK REVIEWS

Kent Masterson Brown presents a well researched, well documented study of Lee's retreat, which is complemented by a series of excellent maps. This is a work I would unhesitatingly recommend to any student of the Civil War, but for those interested in the battle of Gettysburg or the Army of Northern Virginia it is a must.

DAVID L. VALUSKA  
*Kutztown University*

Robert P. Wolensky, Kenneth C. Wolensky, and Nicole H. Wolensky. *Voices of the Knox Mine Disaster: Stories, Remembrances, and Reflections on the Anthracite Coal Industry's Last Major Catastrophe, January 22, 1959*. (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 2005. Pp. iii, 268, glossary, index. Paper \$16.95)

Reflecting on her views of the tragic Knox Mine Disaster, Anita (Ostrowski) Ogin, daughter of a victim stated: "I don't think they should call it the Knox Mine Disaster. I think they should call it the Knox Mine Murders because I feel as though everyone was paid off, everything was under the table and hush-hush, and double-dealings." Others interviewed for the book *Voices of the Knox Mine Disaster* looked at the event as an "act of God." Still others felt it was the fault of the workers themselves and/or the result of a virtually unregulated industry. Some took a narrower perspective and viewed the whole affair as the result of basic human greed. Like any historical event, those directly affected have diverse feelings, opinions, and perspectives on what happened, why it happened, and who should be blamed.

In *Voices of the Knox Mine Disaster*, Robert P. Wolensky, Kenneth C. Wolensky, and Nicole H. Wolensky provide a forum for the varied views on the event and cast a wide-net to construct a narrative that tells the human side of the story. To achieve this, the authors integrate a variety of different sources including oral histories, personal letters, newspaper articles, poetry, song lyrics, photography, among other data. In contrast to their earlier work, *The Knox Mine Disaster* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1999), a historical account of the event, they now present a perspective on how the disaster is remembered after over forty-five years since icy "flood-stage" waters from the north branch of the Susquehanna River, on January 22, 1959, burst through the

ceiling of an illegally dug area of a anthracite mine and trapped and killed twelve miners.

In the first chapter the authors provide a historical framework of the episode. They discuss how the industry began and the structural changes it underwent from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1950s. They also provide an overview of the regulatory functions of the government, the role played by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), and the impact of markets which all came together to shape the character and motives of the company and union. According to the authors, both of those entities found themselves plagued with internal corruption and greed at the time of the disaster. The remainder of the volume consists of first-person accounts (oral and written) from miners who escaped the mine, those involved in successful and failed rescue attempts, affected spouses and siblings, and the various ways in which the community considered the disaster immediately following its occurrence up to the present.

The book introduces this heartrending story in a form that is accessible to a wide audience—from individuals who have a direct interest in the calamity to those with limited knowledge of it or coal mining history. On the university level, *Voices of the Knox Mine Disaster* could serve as a supplemental reader in introductory courses to illustrate an assortment of qualitative research methods or the importance of various workplace issues, particularly those related to health and safety. The interviews also reveal the extent of miner workplace knowledge from the possession of a vernacular aptitude of the mine's geographical layout to a deeper understanding of the underground environment itself, including how the flow of air or the movement of rats, could possibly lead toward a passage-way to freedom.

*Voices of the Knox Mine Disaster* adds an important element to a growing body of knowledge of Pennsylvania's industrial heritage. It not only offers a venue for the documentation of how a major disaster changed the socio-economic conditions of a local region, but provides the reader with a case study on how larger objective forces connect and ultimately shape our own individual biographies and public life. In the face of all the tragedy, this is also a story about how a community and people came together and persevered.

JAMES P. DOUGHERTY  
*Indiana University of Pennsylvania*