

BOOK REVIEWS

John Siney — The Miner's Martyr. By EDWARD PINKOWSKI. (Philadelphia : Sunshine Press, 1963. 335 pp., illustrations, bibliographical essay, notes, index. \$6.00.)

The paper jacket of a book commonly furnishes valuable information about the author and his publication. As this volume well indicates the author is a great researcher and a writer who sees significances and presents them in satisfactory organization and good style.

The title suggests that the author has limited his treatment to coal mining and the biography of a leader none too well known to the general reader. However, he has not completely ignored the general in favor of the particular though he properly hews to the line. And the volume of material of many kinds found in this specialized publication is a revelation. Anyone interested in the history of the coal industry in the two decades after 1860, will find this work of great value and high interest.

Great men and great issues, mentioned in general histories and encyclopedias and publicly known, are not the whole or even the core of good historiography. The stream of history runs deep and some of the drama is akin to surface rippling. The local, the regional and the specialized are fundamental components of the whole. This fact is well demonstrated in this volume. The author boldly compares (p. 161) John Siney with more widely known figures such as John Mitchell and John L. Lewis.

The format of this publication is none too pleasing. It represents the more recent inexpensive printing. A glance at pp. vii-viii (Contents) and p. ix (Illustrations) will make this clear. And the system of Notes (footnotes really), pp. 269-322, if not unique, is nevertheless remarkable, though not without merit. The problem of the allocation of documentation whether to context or to Notes seems to have been troublesome.

Though the author has the reputation of being an excellent writer and had several proofreaders, there is some poor English. The clause, "found the diggers left behind willing to follow him" (pp. 158-159), is somewhat distracting. The last paragraph on p. 167 could have been improved. The statement (p. 292), "The portrait . . . was related" . . . is not free from ambiguity. "Singer" for "signer" (p. 106) seems a typographical error.

Biography is always difficult. Great biographers are few. Writers

with adequate general perspective frequently lack full scholarship, while scholarly writers often lack both perspective and biographical art. As an illustration chapters 16, 17 and 18 have the appearance of addenda.

Excellent authorship is sometimes featured by sins of omission rather than of commission. The treatment of the Molly Maguires is more apologetic than explanatory. The early coal industry and the rise of trade unionism in general are virtually neglected. The later fate of coal mining as affected by technology and by competition from oil and gas is hardly suggested. Annotations in the Index are mainly confined to major items.

The merits of this work greatly outweigh its demerits. All prices today are inflated, but this volume, regardless of its inferior paper and typography, will be found by many to be worth the price indicated. It is a contribution to American historical scholarship and understanding.

Professor Emeritus
University of Pittsburgh

ALFRED P. JAMES

Early American Homes for Today. A Treasury of Decorative Details and Restoration Procedures. By HERBERT WHEATON CONGDON. (Rutland, Vermont: The Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1963. Pp. 236, illustrations, glossary, index. \$12.50.)

The dust jacket of this handsomely produced book consists of a single photographic spread of a pleasant New England house set among lawns and trees; the picture thus embracing the printed pages is so potent a symbol of the contents that the superimposed title seems almost redundant. With this pictorial introduction, one knows what to expect, and one has only to learn if the book is well- or ill-written, inadequately or elegantly illustrated. But the name of this volume is important as an evidence of some interesting cultural trends in present day America.

The title informs us that this is a book about early American houses, and the picture may be taken as the visual symbol of the author's theme. An examination of the contents, however, reveals that this is a volume devoted solely to Vermont houses built prior to 1850. The name is thus, to a degree, misleading, but we recognize it as a device to give a regional product a wider, national distribution in the