
Cultural history, regrettably, has long been one of the most neglected branches of the field, in comparison to political, military, and scientific history and biography, for instance. Hence, it is most encouraging to see a work of the compass and fine scholarship of this one, particularly dealing with that murky region, folklore.

This massive work is based on the instrumental part of a large folk song and music collection made by Bayard and a few helpers, notably Dr. Phil R. Jack, during thirty-five years of fieldwork in southwestern Pennsylvania and northern West Virginia, plus two collections provided by Jacob A. Evanson and Thomas J. Hoge. It must have taken up a large part of the author's time since the publication of his earlier work, Hill Country Tunes, in 1944.

It includes 651 fiddle and forty-four fife tunes, many of them in from a dozen to a score of versions. All of these are provided with information as to sources, variant titles, bibliographical material where available, and other useful data.

It is extremely doubtful if any other living man could have produced such a piece of research. Bayard's expertise in the field of general folklore, as well as fiddle and fife tunes could hardly be matched.

While not a work for the general reader, this monumental volume is a most noteworthy contribution to our knowledge of such rural entertainment in Pennsylvania.

Pittsburgh

George Swetnam

The Dreadful Month. By Carlton Jackson. (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1982. Pp. 161. Foreword, preface, epilogue, index. $16.95, cloth; $7.95, paper.)

"The Dreadful Month" of December 1907 is here the subject of an intensive study by Carlton Jackson of Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green. In the book's first chapter, the author comprehensive-ly records the mining disasters that occurred during these thirty-one
days. In three supplemental chapters and an epilogue, Jackson traces the far-reaching social and political effects of the series of disasters and the resulting creation of private welfare systems, the prototypes of federal programs in existence today.

This book is a careful compilation of historical data. In particular, Jackson's coverage of the Monongah, West Virginia, explosion on "Black Friday," December 6, 1907, is a story well-told, with newspaper accounts, coal company records, and oral history merging in a compelling narrative. Focusing the disaster's effect on one single family — that of Peter Urban, the sole survivor — humanizes the staggering statistics of fatalities which may have been as high as seven hundred.

The aftermath of the tragedy is painstakingly traced in both official and public accounts, with poignant stories of individual miners representing the incomprehensible collective suffering of an entire community: "The body of John Hearmans, an American, was placed in the front parlor of the cottage where he had lived with his wife and four children. Mrs. Hearmans at the very instant, was giving birth upstairs to their fifth child. The Fairmont Times reported 'Mrs. Hearmans' condition is serious. She is aware of the fact that there has been an explosion. She realizes that the entombed miners are dead . . . and knows that the little son whose coming has been looked forward to for months is born into the world an orphan.'"

Chapter 3 is devoted to the formation and operation of the group known as the Monongah Relief Committee (MRC), which provides in retrospect an example of how an extensive welfare program could function privately. The degree of sophistication realized was surprising for that era, and, although the project goal of $250,000 was not reached, a total of $154,261.72 was collected. By early 1908, distribution of funds provided each widow with $200.00, while each child under age sixteen ultimately received $174.00. The maze of complications that arose while awarding funds to European survivors was surmounted by the determination of the group to regard all widows and orphans of the Monongah explosion with an equality unusual for the time.

In succeeding chapters, Jackson explores disasters of the teens and twenties, most notably the Stag Canon Coal Mine explosion of 1913. There, on an October afternoon in Dawson, New Mexico, 263 out of 300 employees lost their lives. Several Pennsylvania disasters are also researched: the Reilly Mine at Spangler blew up on November 6, 1922, killing ninety-four miners; Mather No. 1, across the state, lost 195 men on May 19, 1928. Special emphasis is placed on the
mines of West Virginia, where 119 men died near Morgantown on April 30, 1927, in addition to a list of six other explosions, each leaving more than fifty fatalities in its wake.


In the chapter following, Jackson attempts to answer the question "Why?" He explores the lack of governmental regulations and the wide discrepancy in the investigations of mine officials. The lack of sufficient legislation and appalling shortcomings in enforcement of the few existing laws during the years of the highest number of explosions are truly shocking to us today. Early attempts at governmental control and state and federal efforts at coal mine safety reform are particularly well-researched and presented. The bibliography for these pages provides a useful list of hard-to-find sources.

Finally, The Dreadful Month approaches, in "Perspectives III," the problems of major mine disasters in the United States, beginning with a vivid examination of the Mountaineer Coal Company's Farmington Mine in West Virginia, where seventy-eight men died in a series of explosions. The book ends with an epilogue suggesting that the future cooperation of government, management, labor, and the general public might create an atmosphere of hope that coal mines of the future may be made increasingly safe for workers.

While commendable for its careful research and presentation of the history of the major mine disasters in the United States, Jackson's book demonstrates an unbalanced approach to a complex problem. Focusing sharply on the negligence of coal companies as a prime cause of mine accidents, the text lays little responsibility for such disasters on uncontrollable natural factors and on the well-documented negligence of the miners themselves. In addition, although Jackson argues that the major disasters of the industry's history led to improved mine safety legislation, he largely ignores social and economic factors. The history of reform in mine safety must also include a discussion of deaths during the same period from more mundane causes such as roof falls, accidents with machinery, and other related hazards that actually claimed a greater number of fatalities than the headline-making explosions.

Also, although the author's narrative style is strong, his major dependence on contemporary newspaper accounts gives his material a melodramatic bent more suitable for readers of a generation ago. Particularly gruesome details, such as the discovery of a miner's heart
Imbedded in a crevice after the Monongah explosion, might have been supplemented by an amplification of the chapters dealing with the development of governmental legislation to help prevent such tragedies in the first place. Jackson’s fondness for phrases such as “blown to bits,” and “the surge for the almighty dollar . . . provided the Grim Reaper with an insurance policy against unemployment,” give his work at times an air of yellow journalism.

The author’s stress on the callousness of “absentee mine owners” of West Virginia and Kentucky overlooks the almost dazzling contrast of many coal companies in Western Pennsylvania, where solid financial backing enabled management to provide employees, as early as 1890, with well-designed communities complete with churches, schools, hospitals, and reasonably comfortable housing. Related to the above problem, Jackson’s unrelenting portrayal of the American coal miner as an exploited victim of a heartless industry is often distorted. Nevertheless, Jackson’s book, with its compilation of data and resource materials, is a valuable research tool that belongs on the shelf of any serious student of the history of the mining industry.

Coal Heritage Center
Johnstown Flood Museum
Johnstown, Pennsylvania

Eileen M. Cooper


This is the fifth volume (but the third in the series) of Dr. Arndt’s monumental documentary history of the Harmony Society (ca. 1785-1903). For reviews of the previous volumes, see Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine 58 (Oct. 1975) : 524-28; 62 (Jan. 1979) : 80-82; 65 (July 1982) : 241-43.

The whole story is a fascinating one detailing the life of the society from its founding around 1785 by George Rapp (1757-1847), a vine dresser and linen weaver, in Württemberg, its journey to the United States, the growth of a small agricultural community into a large industrial power, the founding of at least four towns in the United States, and the eventual demise of the society. This particular volume takes the reader through the transition made by the Harmony Society in moving from New Harmony, Indiana, to their new town,