These are the sorts of fruitful questions raised by good studies.

Laurence A. Glasco
University of Pittsburgh

Thunder in the Mountains: The West Virginia Mine War, 1920-21
By Lon Savage

One of the most pervasive popular images of West Virginia is that of a forbidding landscape wracked by endemic violence. The coal “wars” of the early 20th century between agents of those who owned the coal and those who mined it generated potent visual images which did much to establish this perception in the public mind. Lon Savage’s Thunder in the Mountains tells the story of the 1919-1921 mine war in southern West Virginia, one of the most dramatic events in American labor history.

On May 19, 1920, 12 agents (“gun thugs” to the miners) of the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency had just evicted strikers from company houses at nearby Stone Mountain and were returning to Matewan, an independent town in strike-torn Mingo County, to catch a train. There, Mayor Cabell Teterman and Chief of Police Sid Hatfield, both of whom sympathized with the strikers, confronted the agents. During a heated exchange, Teterman was shot to death, and an unknown number of hidden miners opened fire on the guards. When the smoke cleared, seven agents, the mayor, two miners, and one bystander lay dead or dying.

A local grand jury acquitted Hatfield, but the “Matewan massacre” tarnished the Baldwin-Felts reputation for invincibility which agents wore as armor to intimidate the miners and keep out the union. Hatfield therefore was marked for Baldwin-Felts retribution, and one year later agents assassinated the popular policeman in full public view. The hasty exonerations of Hatfield’s assassins in August 1921 triggered a massive miners’ march to free Mingo County from its anti-union “gun thug rule.” To get there, however, the miners had to cross Blair Mountain and pass through the equally hostile anti-union fiefdom of Logan County, controlled politically by Sheriff Don Chafin. Vowing that no union army would tramp across his terrain, the “high sheriff” of Logan” deployed anti-union forces, including the newly formed state police, along the top of Blair to interdict the thousands of union marchers. Savage estimates that the ensuing week-long Battle for Blair Mountain resulted in 16 deaths, 12 of them miners. At the request of the governor, President Harding ordered the National Guard into the area to restore order. The miners cheered the arrival of the National Guard, and believing that they had succeeded in making their plight known to the nation, began returning to their homes.

During September and October 1921, Logan County grand juries returned 1,217 indictments for complicity in the insurrection, including 325 for murder and 24 for treason. Ironically, the trial took place in the same Charles Town courthouse where John Brown was convicted in 1859. Eventually, nearly all of the indictments were dismissed; only one man was convicted of treason, and two others were convicted of murder.

In October 1922, the United Mine Workers of America called off the strike in Mingo County. It had cost the union $2 million, the resignation of its district leadership, and the death of 20 people in addition to those 16 who lost their lives on the march, and still the union had failed to organize the field. Although the UMWA was soundly defeated, and union membership in West Virginia plummeted to a mere 600 by 1929, the conflict nevertheless had enduring consequences. When the right to unionize was finally achieved during the New Deal, coal miners in West Virginia flocked to the UMWA with the fervor of long-suffering believers. For the miners, the “Battle for Blair Mountain” became not only an important symbol of the oppression of capital, but also of the solidarity of labor.

One shortcoming of this otherwise thoroughly readable book is the lack of historical context for the events described. Fortunately West Virginia historian John A. Williams fills this void with an introductory essay sketching the historical backdrop of the 1919-1921 conflict. Not surprisingly, material conditions lay at the heart of this conflict, Williams points out. West Virginia coal producers suffered a comparative disadvantage relative to midwestern and eastern coal producers because the latter’s proximity to the major markets meant that their transportation costs were substantially lower. Therefore, when the coal markets were depressed, as they were after World War I, producers tried to cut miners’ wages, the only significant source of cost savings. Also, under pressure from the federal government, the companies had agreed to accede to union demands in order to ensure industrial peace during the war. Once the war had ended, however, the operators were as determined to return to the ante-bellum status quo as the miners were to maintain their improved status. The antagonism between these competing forces was heightened to explosive proportions by the fact that 90 percent of the miners in southern West Virginia lived in company towns. The coal companies were not just the miners’ employers, but also their landlords, bankers, and merchants. Moreover, the towns had been constructed for an ethnically diverse labor force which the companies recruited from among foreign immigrants, southern blacks, and natives in order to divide and conquer.

Thus, with such combustible production and social relations pre
vailing in the coal fields, we need not resort to some presumed regional trait to explain the violence of these so-called coal wars. The violence was only part of a broader struggle for control of a contested terrain, both literally and figuratively, to determine who would profit from the development of West Virginia's natural resources. In that context, the coal war of 1919-1921 was only a skirmish in the larger struggle for dominance, and if labor occasionally rebelled, capital nevertheless won the war.

Ronald L. Lewis
West Virginia University
(The West Virginia mine war was also the subject of Mary Lee Settle's widely celebrated novel, *The Killing Ground*, as well as a major motion picture, "Matewan," directed by John Sayles, who wrote the introduction to Savage's book.)

Photograph Credits

Touring the Coke Region
Page 100 — Photo by Gene Levy
Page 102 — From *Engineering and Mining Record*, 2 Feb. 1906
Page 103 — Gene Levy
Page 104 — Courtesy USX Corp., Resource Management Division
Page 105 — From Historical Atlas of Westmoreland County, Penna. (Republication, Rimersburg, Pa., 1971; originally published Reading, Pa., 1876)
Page 106-112 — Photos by authors, except 108 (top) courtesy Paul Angelo
Page 113 — Photo by Mel Siegel
Director's Gallery
Page 115 — Large photo courtesy Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Va.; small photo by Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania
A Passion for Paint: the Life of Esther Phillips
Page 120-125 — Photos by Milton Salamon; paintings in the family's collection, permission granted for reproduction.

Pittsburgh Anatomized
All photos courtesy of Archives of Industrial Society, University of Pittsburgh

---

**Mid-Atlantic Roadside Delights**
By Will Anderson

If you enjoy visiting old roadside places, this book will point you to many interesting stops in Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey. The book is divided into three sections: a short history lesson in general building types such as gas stations and diners, using local examples; photographs and collectibles from 1920 to 1960, but without clues as to a site's survival; short descriptions and locations of surviving buildings. Although the book's design means multiple entries about certain towns, this can be fun on the road if you're not in a hurry.

---

**At Home in Pittsburgh**
By Margaret K. Look

**At Home on the Workhouse Farm**
By Margaret K. Look
Powell, Wyo., 1986 (by author). Pp. 125. Photographs. $6.95 paperback, plus $1.50 postage and handling (payable to Margaret Look), from address above.

Margaret Look's first venture is about growing up on Murray Hill Avenue in Pittsburgh's East End; included are her recollections of the early years of the Ellis School, during the 1920s and '30s. The other volume concerns Look's early adolescence on the prison farm at the Allegheny County Workhouse, near Blawnox, Pa.; her father managed the farm from 1919 to 1956. The writing is generally light and homely. The book's extensive conversations in text form are drawn mainly from Look's memory, so both volumes seem suited to those who don't insist on absolute historical accuracy. Workhouse Farm can be recommended for its subject alone; most of the photographs are from the workhouse's annual reports.

**Gathering Laurels in Mexico: The Diary of an American Soldier in the Mexican American War**
Edited by Ann Brown Janes

This diary of Chauncey Forward Sargent, born in Somerset, Pa., is presented in both transcript form and the original long-hand. Like so many war diaries, the writer is preoccupied with what for a general audience are mundane details — troop movements, life in camp, brief descriptions of the countryside. Sargent wrote most every day, from January 1847 to May 1849. Some of the longer entries contain eloquent summaries of a soldier's life and (more rarely) vivid and unique observations of how the world around Sargent was changed by the war.